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Islam and the Grail

Study on the Esotericism of Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*

with ten drawings by Jean-Pierre Ponsoye

**TO THE VENERATED MEMORY
OF SHEIKH ABDEL WAHED YAHYA.**

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FOREWORD

The enigma of the Grail is one of those that will never cease to awaken the profound interest of the meditative man, because its “place” lies beyond all secondary problems of the mind, in the most inward retreat of that mystery of intellection which, for all the great spiritual masters, is a memory — the spontaneous memory of divine things. It is in the heart of this memory, of this essential knowledge of God, that its secret seeks to be found.

Yet this is only a threshold of foreknowledge:

So holy a thing is the Grail
And so spiritual is it

that between this foreknowledge and the ineffable Vision there stretches the entire spiritual distance, the whole length of the Quest evoked by the words of Job: “My ears had heard of you, but now my eye has seen you.”

Some have believed they could define it by saying that it is the symbol of grace. It suffices to have penetrated somewhat, and above all without preconceived notions, into the intimacy of its legend, to perceive that such an interpretation, though not false, is far too imprecise to account for so highly qualified a mystery. Those entrusted with speaking of the Grail have refrained from giving it any particular theological definition — which would in any case be impossible. But they have described it sufficiently, as sign and virtue, as means of approach and participation in the Divine, that one cannot mistake its nature: the “truth of the Grail” is the *visio Dei*, the true *θεωπία*; not the vision of God by man, but the vision of God by Himself in man, His encounter with Himself in man, in the heart of the eternal Instant and of the “divine Silence” where “the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God” (I Cor. II, 10).

Albert Pauphilet had perceived this fundamentally intellectual character of the Quest, in which he saw access to the “secret of universal Life.” In her beautiful study of the *Queste du Saint-Graal* attributed to pseudo-Map, Mme Myrrha Lot-Borodine broadened and surpassed this exegesis by showing that the “Holy Vessel is a divine reality, in the full sense of the word (and) signifies a living and permanent Presence.” Through the history of Galahad, the eminent medievalist discerns in filigree the doctrine of the *imago Dei*, taken up and developed in the West by William of Saint-Thierry and part of the Cistercian school, beginning with the Greek Fathers of the third and fourth centuries.

According to this doctrine, says Mme Lot-Borodine, “charitative cognition... creates — or recreates — that organ of divine life in redeemed man, the intelligent heart, centre or deepest core of our being. According to patristic anthropology, adopted by the Cistercian master, there exists in the exalted soul aspiring to beatitude an inner sense, the ‘eye that sees God,’ by which it gathers and registers what we perceive of God according to the Spirit of Life. But this is possible only thanks to the *Imago Dei* embedded in our living tissue *ab initio*, in the creative act of the seventh day... This conception, rooted in Scripture and developed so greatly in the Christian East, lies at the very basis of the participatory deification of image-creatures, to which our Doctor’s thought spontaneously adheres. Tirelessly he repeats, in agreement with all the ancient spiritual masters, that to see and know God is to be like God. Now, at this summit of the Spirit where charitative illumination takes place, the creature is moved directly, personally, by the Holy Spirit, who is not only the mutual love of Father and Son but also their mutual and perfect knowledge. Hence the transforming union of the creature with its divine model.”

The central notion on which this doctrine rests is designated by the Greeks by the word *θέωσις* (theosis), which, as E. Vansteenberghe says, “is nothing other than the direct knowledge of God and of His Word.” It underlies the mystical theology of pseudo-Dionysius and his successors, notably the conception of divine Filiation in Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa. Its metaphysical foundation is the transcendent Intellect.

When speaking here of “mystical” theology, the word must not be taken in the subjective and affective sense that prevailed in modern times, but in its original sense of “ineffable” (the root *μύ* represents the closed mouth, silence; *μύω*: to be silent; *μυέω*: to instruct without words, to initiate). Maurice de Gandillac defines it well in saying that it designates “a knowledge that comes from God,” and rightly concludes: “That is why (this theology) appears less... as a

systematic discussion in the manner of medieval Summae or modern manuals, than as an ‘initiation,’ a ‘revelation.’”

The same can be said of the “mystical” anthropology alluded to by Mme Lot-Borodine. Here again, it is not a “systematic discussion” nor any other form of speculation on the data of faith, but a “knowledge that comes from God.” It is founded on the constitutive analogy between the individual human being and total, unconditioned Being, and its object is the realization of that Being, called Man by normal metaphysical transposition (in Islam *al-Insān al-Kāmil*, the “Universal Man”; in the Hebrew Qabbalah *Adam Qadmôn*; in Taoism Wang or King), starting from the relative and contingent being who is its symbol and virtuality.

Christ gave the perfect Exemplar, and the doctrine shines clearly through His many teachings, direct and parabolic, concerning the ontology of the Kingdom of God. The germ of this Man is the “grain of mustard seed” of the *Imago Dei* hidden in the Cave of the Heart. Through the birth of this germ, under the action of the Holy Spirit, the Heart becomes the “organ of divine Life,” for it then truly becomes the receptacle of the *Regnum Dei*. It is to this Man, born and grown from that seed like a holy Tree (Matt. XIII, 31–32), that the promises of grace have been made. It is he, not the old man called to die, who will see the “secrets of God,” the “beginning and cause of things,” and who will “know as he has been known,” that is, according to the divine mode of knowledge: by identity.

Thus θεωσις is already here below a possibility of Revelation — “possibility” taken in the metaphysical sense, that is, as a reality of essence. Now, if every reality of Revelation seeks participation, θεωσις, by its immediate and central character — because it is “without enigmas or figures” — postulates a doctrine and a way proper to it. In a few words, this is what grounds both the necessity and the orthodoxy of esotericism.

That there was indeed a Christian esotericism, comparable to Hebrew, Islamic, or other esotericisms, cannot be contested, and the legend of the Grail is not the least proof of this.

Let us first say that the preceding considerations do not concern only the *Queste* attributed to pseudo-Map. Although relatively late and highly elaborated, it nonetheless remains indebted to the Grail tradition, which had already imposed itself in earlier texts as a major teaching — multiple, no doubt, in its school interpretations, but unique in its essential object and doctrinal foundations. The conception of Perceval in Chrétien and Wolfram — the “naive youth” who, through successive initiatory stages, attains the Royalty of the Grail — appears closer to this primitive teaching than that of Galahad, in which the messianic idea is accentuated at the expense of spiritual realization, of which it is only the consequence.

As for the true nature of this teaching, the confrontation of the principal data provided by the general context of the cycle allows one to conclude without ambiguity:

It is, in fact, a defined doctrine (symbolized by a book in Robert de Boron and in the *Grand Saint-Graal*, expounded by a Master in Chrétien de Troyes and Wolfram von Eschenbach), received by tradition and highly secret (“the great Secret called the Grail,” says Robert). This doctrine concerns a Mystery present on earth with the fullness of its celestial virtue, to which one

accedes only by qualification and at the peril of death. A capital notion, unanimously affirmed by the various versions that share it as their common foundation.

In this Mystery, whose support and sign is a most holy Object (the Cup that contained Christ's Blood, or the Stone descended from Heaven), the very essence of Revelation is communicated "openly." It is Word (the "most holy words"), Light (it is seen and it illumines), and Life (offered to the elect in a primordial Supper, the paradisiacal archetype of Eucharistic communion). It may be intuited from a certain stage of advancement on the Way (in the *Queste* it shows itself to the Knights of the Round Table; in Chrétien and Wolfram it lets itself be seen by Perceval during his first stay at the Grail Castle, etc.), and certain technical means allow approach to it (the "secret prayer" of Chrétien, with the invocation of the Lord's fearful names). It is kept in a hidden Centre, accessible only to rare elect (the Grail Castle in Chrétien; the unknown residence of Bron's descendants "toward the West" in Robert; Montsalvage in Wolfram; Corbenic and then Sarraz in the *Queste*).

It is celebrated in a special liturgy (the "service of the Grail"), to which one has wrongly attributed a "magical" character, whereas in all the works its miraculous efficacy is clearly attributed to the divine Presence itself (symbolized in Wolfram, for example, by the Host descending from Heaven onto the Stone every Good Friday). This liturgy is ensured by a holy community of sacerdotal character — though not a clergy — which remains unknown to the world, as does its sacred deposit, whose line of transmission is distinct from the apostolic succession from the beginning (personal revelation of Christ to Joseph of Arimathea in Robert and his continuators; heavenly investiture of Titurel and his line in Wolfram and Albrecht).

If one adds that the Quest is, by definition, an active way of access to the Divine; that this way is reserved to the Knights of the Round Table, the central institution of terrestrial Chivalry, whose initiatory character cannot be contested; that even these initiates enter only by choice and on their own initiative; that it is in no way fortuitous or individual but leads the elect hero, through predestined, typical, and supernatural trials, to the supreme degree, at once sacerdotal and royal, of celestial Chivalry — one may judge that there are more than enough proofs: the teaching of the Grail is indeed an esoteric magisterium.

It is this quality that legitimately sets it apart from that of the Church, without contradicting it, and without the Church ever having questioned its orthodoxy. It is also this quality that accounts for the universality of the Grail and for non-Christian sources at the origin of its legend.

Among all the problems posed by this latter observation, one of those least attended to by Romance scholars is that of the Islamic influence detectable in at least one of the major and primitive branches of the cycle: Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*. If they have seen in it the mark of an oriental origin of the legend, and if some have willingly admitted the role of the Arabs in its transmission to the West, they have generally not sought to give a profound explanation of the presence — at first glance surprising — of these Islamic elements, and their coherence with the symbolism of a spiritual way of apparently specifically Christian character.

In fact, this explanation could only be found in the light of traditional esoteric doctrines, which, by the pure intellectuality of their content and the transcendental character of their "proof" itself,

escape the inductive and analytic method of so-called scientific criticism, as well as the purely rational criteria of philosophical and even religious exegesis.

It is this explanation that we have sought in the present work, relying, as far as possible, on these doctrines and on that sealed Book which only they permit one to open: universal symbolism, wherein is hidden, together with the secret of the Grail's genealogy, that of the sacred Tradition, multiple in its forms and one in its essence, in which, since the origin of time, the Word has manifested itself as in its necessary hypostasis.

Today we know more than before that Christianity and Islam, in the Middle Ages, did not only confront one another, and that in confronting one another they did not only fight. Concordant and reliable signs attest that there existed between their responsible elites, beyond anathema and combat, not merely surface exchanges, but a true spiritual conjunction in which Islamic intellectuality played, for centuries, the role of inspirer and guide.

Surprising though it may seem a priori, this conjunction — which must not be confused with vulgar syncretism — is not different from, nor even truly distinct from, that which already united Islamic esotericism and Jewish esotericism founded on the Torah and the Qabbalah. It is the normal, though necessarily hidden, manifestation of the Mystery of Unity that metaphysically and eschatologically binds all authentic revelations, and especially Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, common heirs of the great Abrahamic tradition.

Prophetic Cup of the Celts, Vessel filled with divine blood, or Stone of Revelation descended in the oriental Heaven, the Grail is the sign of this mystery, transmitted secretly from the depths of the ages, bearer of that same primordial Light — that *luce intelletual piena d'Amore* which Dante contemplated in Paradise, and which, in a chosen moment, the West was astonished to see shining in its own heart.

We have been greatly aided in our task by M. Michel Vâlsan, translator and commentator of the great Master of Taşawwuf, Muḥyiddīn Ibn 'Arabī, who kindly reviewed our work, gave us many precious indications, and communicated to us several unpublished texts, as well as by Mme Hélène Bernard-Merle, agrégée of the University, attached to the National Centre for Scientific Research, and Dr. Henri Hélot, who provided invaluable assistance in the establishment and verification of bibliographical data. We here express to them our full gratitude.

I Kyot

The Grail legend — perhaps the most prestigious ever to have presented itself to prayerful thought — appeared at the end of the twelfth century in a sudden fashion, while at the same time laying claim to a long and secret tradition. Three romances constitute its first flowering, and in many respects the finest. These are Chrétien de Troyes's *Perceval li Gallois* or *Conte del Graal*, Robert de Boron's *Estoire dou Graal*, and Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*. Their respective dates of appearance are still a matter of debate; nevertheless, most commentators agree on the priority of *Perceval*, which would thus be, around 1180, the first public expression of the legend.

Robert's work would fall a few years later, and Wolfram's between 1200 and 1205. Of these three romances, one — Chrétien's — remained unfinished and is silent on the origins of the Grail; another — Robert's — stages, under the name of Grail, the Vessel that served at the institution of the Supper and in which Joseph of Arimathea gathered Christ's blood. As for Wolfram, here is what he reports:

“Kyot, the well-known master, found at Toledo, among abandoned manuscripts, the substance of this adventure, written down in Arabic script (*in heidenischer schrifte dirre aventure gestifte*). He first had to learn to make out the characters a, b, c (but he did not try to initiate himself into black magic). It was a great advantage for him to have received baptism, for otherwise this story would have remained unknown. For indeed there is no pagan wise enough to reveal to us the nature of the Grail and its secret virtues.

“A pagan ('Arab', *heiden*), Flégétânis, had acquired high renown through his knowledge. This great physician (*physiôn*, a scholar in cosmological sciences) was of Solomon's line: his parents belonged to a family of Israel in very ancient times, when men were not yet protected by baptism from the fires of hell. It was he who wrote the adventure of the Grail. Flégétânis was born of an Arab father. He worshipped a calf, in which he saw a god. How can the devil make a plaything of people so wise? Why has He who commands all things and knows all wonders not delivered their mind from these errors?

“The pagan Flégétânis knew how to predict the decline of each star and the moment of its return. He knew how long each one takes to come back to its point of departure. It is by the circuit of the stars that all things on earth are governed. The pagan Flégétânis discovered, by examining the constellations, profound mysteries of which he spoke only trembling. There was, he said, an object called the Grail. He had clearly read its name in the stars. A troop of angels had set it down on earth and then flown away far beyond the stars. These angels were too pure to remain here below. From that time onward, it was men who had become Christians through baptism, and as pure as angels, who were to take care of it. It was always men of high merit whom one called to guard the Grail.

“Thus spoke Flégétânis. Kyot, the wise master, then searched in Latin books to find where a people might have lived pure enough and inclined enough to a life of renunciation to become guardian of the Grail. He read the chronicles of the kingdoms of Britain, of France and of Ireland, and of many others besides, until he found in Anjou what he sought. He read in truthful books the history of Mazadan. He found recorded the whole succession of his descendants: he saw elsewhere how Triturel and his son Frimutel had transmitted the Grail by inheritance to Anfortas, who had as sister Herzloïde; and it was with her that Gahmuret had begotten a son who is the hero of this tale (7).”

The existence of the Grail, its celestial origin, and its presence on earth under the guardianship of Christians “as pure as angels,” has thus been revealed, according to Wolfram, by a pagan sage — that is to say, a Muslim — for it was under this term that Muslims were commonly designated in the Middle Ages, in opposition to Christians and Jews. This quality, confirmed by the fact that he was born of an Arab father, gives a particular character to the Israelite ancestry otherwise

attributed to him: the connection of that ancestry to Solomon's line makes it, in reality, a filiation of prophetic wisdom — that is, here, esoteric.

Solomon is in fact venerated in Islam as a great prophet, and Islamic esotericism regards him as the exemplary type of a certain spiritual way, to which the sciences of the cosmic domain are particularly attached — precisely those sciences evoked, in the medieval sense, by the word “physician” used of Flégétânis (8). He is, moreover, the builder of the Temple, to which the two great Western traditional currents of builders' confraternities and the *milites Templi Salomonis*, or Templars, are connected.

In Flégétânis are thus expressly attested, at once, the Islamic source of the notion of the Grail — or rather, perhaps, of its becoming conscious — and the link of that source with the esoteric tradition to which, on the other hand, the Order of the Temple laid claim. The imputation of idolatry must not, in this respect, mislead: it is judged by the context, and Wolfram himself moreover underlines the contradiction it contains. Flégétânis could not, at one and the same time, worship a calf and have attained a degree of spiritual knowledge that enabled him — he alone among all “pagans” or Christians — to probe the celestial mysteries in order to read there the name of the Grail; that is, to discover and recognize, in the heaven of contemplation, a pure metaphysical essence.

It is known, moreover, that Muslims were, as a whole and against the evidence, the object of similar accusations. That on Wolfram's part this is only a precaution — indeed, a fairly obvious one — in order to protect from the hostile incomprehension of the vulgar the secret of transmission he had to reveal, may be judged from the following passage of the *Zohar*, where one may see in addition that, through the mouth of Flégétânis, it was indeed the two fraternal esoteric wisdoms of Judaism and Islam that were speaking:

“Across the whole extent of the sky whose circumference surrounds the world, there are figures and signs by means of which we can discover the deepest secrets and mysteries. These figures are formed by the constellations and the stars, which are for the Sage an object of contemplation, a source of mysterious delights. These shining forms are those of the letters with which God created Heaven and Earth; they form His mysterious and holy Name (9).”

But if this imputation is without substance, it is perhaps not without explanation. It seems, in fact, to be connectable to the symbolism of the divine Throne and to the history of Israel's worship of the Calf. The Calf (*Ijl*) is a figuration of the Bull (*Thawr*), which is, together with Man, the Lion, and the Eagle, one of the four “animals” that bear the Throne — who are in reality “angels” (*Malā'ikah*). Muḥyiddīn says of it that “it is the one that the Sāmīrī (Samaritan) had seen, and he imagines that it was Moses' god, and in consequence he made for his people the Calf, saying: This is your god and Moses' god” (Qur'ān, XX, 90).

It has been admitted, since Hagen, that Flégétânis is in reality the title of an Arabic book, *Felek-Thāni*. Since this concerns a secret traditional teaching, the word can in truth designate a book and a man, or, more likely, the organization of which that book or that man was the interpreter. One will note, moreover, that although having alluded to a manuscript, Wolfram speaks of Flégétânis as of a living man, and reports his words as an oral teaching. What matters, then, is

not to know whether it is a book or a man, but to know whether Flégétânis is authentically the transcription of the Arabic *Felek-Thâni*, which translates as “second sphere” or “second planetary heaven.” In any case, this is now admitted by most commentators. The considerations that follow will make the scope of this identification apparent.

One of the highest initiatic categories in Islam is constituted by the *Abdâl* (“Solitaries,” sing. *Badal*). “The *Abdâl*,” says Muḥyiddīn Ibn ‘Arabī, “are seven, never more nor less. Through them, Allāh watches over the seven terrestrial climates. In each climate there is a *Badal* who governs it (10).” Each of these climates corresponds respectively to one of the seven planetary heavens, and the *Badal* who governs it is the earthly representative of the Pole (*Quṭb*) of the corresponding heaven.

The second planetary sphere is the heaven of Mercury. The Pole of that heaven being *Sayyidunā ‘Īsā* (Jesus), his representative on earth (in the sixth climate) will, within Islam, have a function more particularly Christic, and in a special affinity with Christianity. It is also said that the *Badal* representing the Pole of Mercury’s heaven possesses, among other sciences, that of the art of writing (‘*ilmu-l-kitābah*), for it is from Mercury’s heaven (*al-Kātib*) that inspiration comes to preachers and writers, whereas poets draw from the spiritual influences of Venus’s heaven (*Zuhrah*). Let us note in this regard that, in the Arabic sense of the term, a work like the *Parzival* is not a poem, but a narrative. Finally, it is said that the *Abdâl* are “knowers of what Allāh has deposited in the Planets as ordering of things and secrets, namely in their movements and their positions in the celestial mansions.”

Here we find again the three principal characteristics of Flégétânis, which can explain why Wolfram regards him as a living being: his qualities as astronomer, narrator, and the “Christic” orientation of his intellectual activity. Let us add further that if, as was seen above, Flégétânis was more particularly devoted to the Bull, one of the four bearers of the Throne, one could finally see there his correspondence with one of the four Pillars of the World (*Awtâd*), who constitute an initiatic category superior to that of the *Abdâl*, from among whom they are chosen. His “Christic” characteristic would not thereby be eliminated, but on the contrary confirmed in a special way by the fact that one of the *Awtâd* rests on the heart of ‘Īsā, the other three resting on the heart of Adam, of Ibrāhīm, and of Muḥammad.

To understand the meaning of these data, it is necessary to place them within Islam’s general conception of itself as a synthesis of universal Prophecy, by virtue of its being the last of the law-giving prophecies before the end of times. The Prophet Muḥammad is himself the “Seal of Prophecy,” and he has received from God the Summations of Words (*Jawāmi‘u-l-Kalim*), that is, “according to one sense of this expression,” says Michel Vâlsan, “the essences of the prophetic Words revealed previously (11).” It is in this capacity, and by this providential disposition, that Islam, as one can see, contains within its economy a typology and spiritual means in special correspondence with the other traditional forms, which thus enter, with their founders, into a transcendent and total Islamic Order covering the whole human cycle. And this is what, among all these forms, legitimately qualifies it as universal mediator.

This doctrine was particularly illustrated by Muḥyiddīn Ibn ‘Arabī in the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* (the “Bezels of Wisdom”). In this book, offered in praise to “He who causes the Wisdoms to descend upon the Hearts of the Words” (in other words, of the Prophets), the Shaykh al-Akbar (“the greatest of the Masters”) represents each of these specific Wisdoms by a bezel or precious stone bearing the divine Seal engraved upon it and descending from Heaven to be set into its predestined receptacle, the Heart of the Prophet in question: “The bezel of each Wisdom,” he says, “is the very Word that is attached to it.”

Commenting on this passage, Michel Vâlsan says that “the different Words (personified by the Prophets) are thus, in their depths, themselves these bezels, these celestial Stones engraved with the Imprints of divine Kingship, and descended to be set into the human condition and thus to mark the particular characters of the cycles that correspond to them.” It goes without saying that their participation in the transcendent Islamic Order in no way excludes their universality nor the character of prophetic totality that they retain within their own perspectives.

Among these Stones, there is one that particularly interests us here: it is the Stone of the one known in Islam as the “Seal of universal Sanctity” (*Khatamu-l-Wilâyati-l-‘Āmmah*), or as the “Seal of the Sanctity of the Envoys and the Prophets,” and who is *Sayyidunā ‘Īsā*, Jesus. Can one doubt that this is that Stone whose name Flégétânis had “clearly read in the stars”? If he read it there, it is because this Name forms an integral part of Islam’s spiritual Heaven.

But Flégétânis also knew, and taught Kyot, the present existence of this Stone on earth, under the guard of a “celestial” Chivalry unknown to the West, though Christian — which is a first indication of secret relations on the esoteric plane, of which other examples will be seen, beginning with the wise Master’s journey to Toledo. It is permissible to see in this symbolic rapprochement a true solution to that special question, for it accounts for all the principal features of the Toledo episode: first, the fact that Flégétânis provides the principle of the Adventure and the notion of the Grail’s earthly presence, but not the technical Way to reach it, because, being a Christian Way, it belongs to a Christian Master to trace it. Next, the fact that Kyot recognizes, in its transcendental reality and beyond the differences of religious forms, the very Object of his own Quest. Finally, that major fact — and in our view decisive — that, in its form as celestial Stone, Wolfram’s Grail finds a direct Islamic correspondent, with a doctrine exactly parallel — other aspects of which will be found later — and, at the same time, offers a contrast, otherwise inexplicable, with the symbolism of the Holy Vessel.

As for Kyot, whose enigmatic personality has given rise to so many controversies, traditional data seem, it appears, to allow one to form a fairly precise idea of him and of his role. It is known first of all that his very existence has been contested, chiefly because no text has been found and no mention of a Provençal poet of this name, and because, moreover, the theme of *Parzival* is so closely akin to that of *Perceval li Gallois* that some commentators have wished to regard the former as simply taken up and developed from the latter. People have also been astonished that this Provençal bore a northern French name and spoke in French.

These arguments do not, in our view, weigh much against the contrary proofs. The name Kyot is most likely a pseudonym, and its northern origin did not prevent Wolfram from giving it to a

king of Catalonia. As for the use of French, it is no more astonishing on the part of a learned Provençal than, for example, on that of the Italian poet Brunetto Latini, who explained himself in a famous text.

If it is true, moreover, that the two works offer close similarities even in details, this only shows that Wolfram knew Chrétien's text and used it on the literary plane, for these similarities are accompanied by differences of form and substance sufficient to exclude the possibility that it was his only, or even his principal, source. Thus places or characters of first importance, which Chrétien designates without naming, have a name in Wolfram, and most often of French or Provençal origin, such as the Grail Castle (Montsalvage), the hermit (Trévrizent), the Fisher King (Anfortas), the Grail Virgin (Repanse de Joye); others bear a different name (Condwiramour instead of Blanchefleur), and others do not exist in Chrétien (Feirefiz, Gahmurel). The very language of *Parzival* presents, besides an immense vocabulary of Latin and French origin that far exceeds that of the Champenois — more elegant and more restrained, but less rich — certain philological traces of Provençal attachments, noted long ago, to which must be added items of Arabic scientific terminology — the one and the other perfectly foreign to Chrétien's text (12).

As for the substance, there exist important differences of expression, emphasis, and symbolic intention to which we shall have to return; let us recall here that the concordance between the two works covers only a part of *Parzival*: its first two and its last four books owe nothing to its French counterpart, without the overall development of the narrative showing for that any discontinuity or any break in level. Such are the principal data of a literary order that today incline most commentators to admit the existence of a French and Provençal source distinct from Chrétien, in accordance moreover with the author's repeated testimony.

But what is, for us, more decisive still is that, if the question of a source can be posed from the point of view of literary execution, it cannot be posed from the doctrinal point of view. As will be seen, *Parzival* offers, as a whole and homogeneously, the exposition in symbolic mode of a metaphysical and initiatic doctrine that Wolfram obviously did not owe to Chrétien and that nevertheless he could only have received. That alone suffices to prove, at once, his intellectual freedom with respect to the latter, and his dependence upon a master whose personality and function stood on an entirely different plane. Let us add that, for us, his free and fervent avowal of this dependence is not the least proof of its truth.

As for the anonymity of this master under the pseudonym of Kyot, it can astonish only those who see in the Grail legend merely a fiction of individual invention and "edifying" intention. Such people ought also to be astonished that the Middle Ages saw the flowering of so many traditions, oral or written, by unknown authors or attributed to symbolic eponyms such as Merlin, and to observe, for the Grail as for all the other legendary themes, that none of the known "editors" claimed paternity for it, but that all, on the contrary, expressly referred to an antecedent tradition, about which they remain extremely discreet when they do not say that they received it by more or less miraculous ways.

In an age for which there was value only in truth, and for which there was truth only divine — therefore revealed and transmitted — a claim to originality would have been the best way to ruin one's own credibility. Wolfram boasts only of being faithful to the "right tale" (*die rechten maere*), and Chrétien, the earliest of these editors, far from flattering himself with the least invention, lays claim to nothing other than to versify the best tale that ever be told at a royal court:

It is the great *Conte del Graal*
Of which the Count gave him the Book.

Of this mysterious Book, Hélinand, as early as 1205, said he could find no trace. No trace has been found either of the "great Book" in which, according to Robert de Boron,

... the histories are written,
By the great clerks made and spoken.
There are written the great secrets
That are called the Grail (13).

As for that of the *Grand Saint-Graal*, of the cycle attributed to Map, its anonymous author says he received it from Heaven, from the hands of an angel. One sees from this that it is not necessary that Kyot should have written in order to be invoked as an authority — perhaps the contrary would be truer — and that this authority is not in reality that of a man as such, however great he may be, but that of a truthful tradition.

Unable to understand the traditional spirit and to conceive the nature of these means and the scope of their intentions, modern criticism remains perplexed before facts whose meaning becomes evident as soon as one has recognized, on the one hand, the supra-human origin and thereby the universality, the sacred character and operative virtue of the symbolism transmitted by all the revealed Traditions, and, on the other hand, the existence, at their centre, insofar as they remain intact, of a Mystery of Knowledge that is nothing other than that, metaphysically necessary, of the divine Presence in their very heart.

It is this Mystery, preserved and transmitted by initiatic means, that manifested itself suddenly with the Grail at the end of the twelfth century. The doctrine of the Grail is only the doctrine of this Mystery in Christian terms. Consider the fundamental unity of the theme despite the diversity of the origin and nature of the elements it integrates, the indefinite fertility of its symbolic expressions, the deep accord and organic coherence of the multiple versions dispersed in space and time, and one will recognize that a principle of identity and rectitude is hidden at the centre of this prodigious flowering and asserts itself there with the authority of a revelation.

To discern its true nature required other keys than those at the disposal of literary or religious exegesis. If one possesses in our day some light on this subject, it is owed to an admirable work of doctrinal science, of power and purity of intellect: that of the late René Guénon. We shall frequently, in the course of this study, have occasion to refer to his works, which have renewed the question of the Grail among many others. But we refer even now to those which generally

treat questions touching on our subject, notably that of initiation and initiatic transmission, that of spiritual Centres, that of the nature of the Grail (14).

Robert de Boron's words are, moreover, sufficiently clear for anyone who has the least notion of traditional esotericism: the Book "in which the great secrets are written" is a body of sacred teaching reserved to the keeping of "great clerks," which until then had been the object only of an oral transmission, as Robert specifies elsewhere:

Never had it been recounted
The great History of the Grail
By any man who was mortal (15).

To return to Kyot: he was, Wolfram says, Provençal and spoke French. The word Provence designated in the Middle Ages the ancient Roman *Provincia*. It included Septimania and extended as far as Toulouse, covering a region that was long under the dependence of Muslim Spain and strongly received the imprint of its civilization. This imprint long retained, among the people, a prestigious character. One attributed to the Arabs, says Fauriel, "everything that offered something marvellous; one supposed a superior industry": fortresses, towers, more or less legendary underground passages, weapons, goldsmith's work, fabrics, horses, etc. This character is found again, as we shall see, strongly marked in *Parzival*, and this is not in favour of its direct Provençal ties.

But Islam's influence was not limited to that. It is found notably in the great movement of courtly Love, which cannot truly be understood if one ignores its esoteric source. If it presents certain differences from its Islamic counterpart — differences on which people have wanted to rely in order to contest their common nature and inspiration — this is first because the latter had far less need to conceal its initiatic character, and next because spiritual affinities and intellectual accord exclude neither independence of mind nor the freedom of the genius of race, but on the contrary postulate unity of doctrine. And that, indeed, is what one observes, as Fauriel showed very well: different geniuses interpreting one and the same theory, one and the same spiritual and intellectual vision of Love.

Provence's relations with Muslims did not, moreover, cease with the departure of the latter. Whether through the intermediary of the Jewish masters of the schools of Septimania, who continued to represent their culture and intellectuality, or directly with the Muslim principalities of Spain, these relations in fact continued throughout the Middle Ages.

The contacts made by Kyot in that country with Muslims are all the more plausible in that there are famous examples (Gerbert of Aurillac, who under the name Sylvester II was to be the pope of the Millennium; Raymond Lull; Brunetto Latini; etc.), and it is indeed there that K. Bartsch, one of the most discerning commentators on *Parzival*, saw the immediate origin of the legend, which would have been brought from the East by the Arabs. Certain versions moreover give the chosen race from which Titurel descends — ancestor of Parzival — as originating in Asia. Titurel's forebear is said to have entered Europe under Vespasian after converting to Christianity, and to have settled in the north-east of Spain, whose various kingdoms he subdued with the help of the Provençals. It is not without significance, moreover, to note that the marches of Portugal and

Spain, as well as Languedoc, were the first countries in Europe where the Templars established themselves (16).

One may perhaps grant that all of this lends a singular weight to Wolfram's statement concerning the existence of an original Provençal Grail tradition and its connection with Islam. As for the filiation of *Parzival* with that tradition — which he likewise affirms positively — it is supported by a certain number of facts: first, as we have seen, by philological indications that seem fairly decisive; next, by a good many allusions noted among the troubadours to the most typical situations of Wolfram's text; finally, by the intrinsic characteristics of the text itself. André Moret writes on this subject in the Introduction to his edition of *Parzival*: "... the most recent investigations have proved that, in this domain as well (that of language), Wolfram was influenced by French models. M. Ehrismann in particular has shown that the obscure and tormented manner of Wolfram's style, so criticised by Gottfried, in fact goes back to the Provençal hermeticism of *trobar clus*." Further on he adds: "His 'obscure' style is not a sign of incapacity; it is the manifestation of a conscious art... *Trobar clus* is 'closed' poetry, poetry of initiates, founded on the principle that lyricism must be an art reserved to a small number of adepts."¹⁷ In fact, while it is perfectly right to speak here of "poetry of initiates," in the authentic sense of the term, it is all too evident that this is not merely a matter of "lyricism," even in the broadest sense one might wish to give that word. A simple examination of the works in question — as indeed of medieval "literary" works in general — suffices to show that this "closed" character is not due to form but to substance, and more especially to the symbolic nature imposed upon it by the transcendent and ineffable quality of the realities it is meant to transmit.

These few data will allow one to form a more precise idea of the figure of Kyot. Wolfram calls him "the well-known master" (*der meister wol bekant*), the "wise master," "the *schainture*" (the singer, or rather the enchanter). He refers to him as an irrefutable authority, the only one it is fitting to invoke with respect to the Grail: "Kyot," he says, "is the name of the enchanter who, because he was a man of great art, applied himself to singing and telling, and did it so well that many people even today still owe him great joys. Kyot is a Provençal who found in Arabic (*heidenisch*) writings the adventures of Parzival. Everything he has told in French, I wish — if my mind is not too feeble — to tell you again in German."¹⁸ In a celebrated passage at the end of the poem, he declares: "Master Chrétien de Troyes has told this story, but by altering it; and Kyot, who transmitted to us the true tale (*die rehten maere*), is rightly vexed by this. The Provençal tells us, as a truthful storyteller, how Herzeloïde's son, the predestined hero, became king of the Grail after Anfortas had forfeited his merit. From Provence this tale has come, in its true form, into the German lands; it makes known to us the denouement of the adventure. As for me, Wolfram von Eschenbach, I wish to report nothing more than what the Provençal master has told us."

Thus Kyot is the first and sole authentic revealer, on the one hand, of part of the notion of the Grail — of its history and its present existence on earth — gathered by him in Spain from an Arabic tradition; and, on the other hand, of that of a Christian lineage guarding the mystery, which had remained unknown until he discovered its trace in the ancient chronicles of Anjou. His title of master makes him a clerk; the nature of his teaching demonstrates the esoteric

character of this clerical status, moreover confirmed by his other title of enchanter, which must be compared with that of Merlin, whose name, as René Guénon has shown, concealed Celtic spiritual authority. One should note that the word “enchanter” then had a technical sense that the learned equivalent word “incantator” only suggests. The allusion to the refusal of *nigromanzi*, in connection with “discerning the characters,” suggests that this entails the assimilation of orthodox secret sciences: from then on, it can only be a matter of true initiatic incantation.

As for baptism, which enabled Kyot to penetrate the nature of the Grail and its secret virtues, what we shall say later concerning Feirefiz’s baptism may perhaps make it possible to understand what this really means. Finally, the distinction between “song” and “tale” seems quite clearly to evoke the double function — on the plane of method and that of doctrine — of the true spiritual master, which seems to be confirmed by the notion of “great art,” which must be understood in an operative and not an “aesthetic” sense, and perhaps also by those “great joys” that many people still owed him in Wolfram’s time.

The true problem of Kyot, then, is not to know who he was, but what was the esoteric authority to which Wolfram attributes the discovery of the Grail (on the basis of a Muslim source), the indication of certain technical means for attaining it (veiled beneath the fabulation of the Quest), and, implicitly at least, the joining of the Grail theme to that of Arthur — with all that this signifies regarding the Christian integration of the Celtic inheritance.

Towards this authority he never loses an occasion to mark his dependence and fidelity. Now Wolfram was a knight, and very probably affiliated with the Order of the Temple, with which he openly identifies the Order of the Grail. Since his work is plainly something quite other — as one can already perceive — than a simple romance composition with a religious theme, it is scarcely likely that he would have disposed of it thus without the assent of the “holy House.” One fact might confirm this: namely that the mysterious and yet “well-known” master is not only alive in Wolfram’s time — since he knows Chrétien’s work and judges it — but also, as another passage (19) bears witness, directly inspires and controls his disciple’s labour. We shall try later to discern what concerns such a publication might have been intended to answer.

Let us note for the moment that, if Kyot does not simply represent the Temple’s spiritual authority, he must have had very close relations with it.

¹⁷ *Parzival*, selected passages, introd., notes, and glossary by A. Moret, Aubier, Paris, 1943.

¹⁸ Tonnelat, op. cit., vol. I, p. 364. Tonnelat’s reading is “enchanter” (same in Wilmotte). Even if one wished to render *la schainture* as “the singer,” the word could here have only a strong and very precise meaning, just as the word *Aventiure* designates nothing less than the Quest itself. The hypothesis that Kyot was none other than Guyot de Provins is today abandoned.

(19) *Parzival*, 452, 29 ff.: “It is from him that Parzival is now going to learn the secret history of the Grail. If anyone has questioned me on this earlier and argued with me in the hope that I would tell him how it is, he has gained only a shameful failure from it. Kyot has asked me to reveal nothing” (trans. A. T. Hatto).

II The Baruk

One may now ask what the exact meaning is of the accusation levelled against Chrétien. It is certainly not without grave motive that, at the end of the work — and when nothing in particular called for a reference to the author of the *Conte del Graal* — Wolfram, supported by Kyot's authority, is anxious to mark a disagreement which, though not specified, is clearly presented as involving the meaning of the work.

One recent commentator, M. Jean Fourquet, thinks that "what makes the difference between the *Conte del Graal* and the *Parzival* is not the object of the literary presentation, but the manner in which it is presented. Chrétien," he says, "does not let us forget that his narrative is a game, of which he remains the sovereign master. Wolfram plays the game with such passion that his poem presents itself to us as the expression of a faith (20)." This remark is partly just, in that it notes — in Wolfram's favour — a difference indeed fairly clear in the depth and intensity of intention. But Chrétien was not the "sovereign master" of his work, and did not present himself as such, as we have seen — and Wolfram's poem offers not the expression of a faith, but of a certainty. For neither the one nor the other was the Grail legend a game, if by that one means a literary fancy with no other significance than that of a courtly entertainment. That would be to attribute to them a worldly and profane mentality wholly foreign to the traditional spirit, and which did not exist at that time.

Chrétien is — as he himself says — the editor and not the author of a theme on which he remains dependent; otherwise Wolfram's attack would not be intelligible. That he took his subject seriously is plain enough from the passage in which he describes the Grail procession, or the one in which the hermit teaches Perceval the secret invocation:

Enough of the names of Our Lord,
The most powerful and the best,
That a man's mouth dares to name,
Unless he name them in fear of death.
When he had taught him the prayer,
He forbids him that in any way
He say it except in peril.

One can only — by comparison with Wolfram's corresponding passages — reproach the laconic character of these capital passages: Chrétien delivers the symbolic data in a raw state, as it seems, such as he received them in outline, and his art — which is not in dispute — bears rather on poetic execution than on intellectual elaboration. But nothing allows one to say that he did not penetrate their meaning, or that he did not wish to remain reserved, even if it is true that, on the whole, his narrative is far from offering the symbolic insights and the intellectual amplitude of Wolfram's.

In any case, this would only be a deficiency, not an alteration. As for differences of form concerning the Grail itself — a cup in the one and a precious stone in the other — they are the

result of distinct but closely linked symbolic perspectives. They are, moreover, only apparent: Chrétien's cup is set with precious stones of a unique character, like Wolfram's:

All other stones surpassed
Those of the Grail, without doubt.

The presence, in both cases, of a miraculous host affirms the identity of the Eucharistic symbolism. No doubt, as symbol, the Stone has a more universal character than the Cup, although the latter is laden with meanings proper to it; and one will recall here the accounts according to which this Cup would have been cut from the emerald that fell from Lucifer's forehead at his fall. But this is a normal particularization, not a diminishment, still less an alteration.

M. Jean Frappier seems to us to come quite close to the truth when he remarks, in his very detailed study of the Grail Procession: "The *Conte del Graal*, even supplemented by part of its Continuations... cannot account for strange particularities of the German poem, such as, for example, its whole Arabic and oriental side, the story of the origin of the Grail, the identification of the knights of Montsalvage with the Order of the Templars, and above all the exaltation of the house of Anjou in which Wolfram had no reason to take an interest. The hypothesis of a second French source, which would be added to that of Chrétien, remains still the most plausible (21)." It is indeed there, in fact, that one must seek, as to substance, the specific difference between the two works, otherwise so closely similar; and it is impossible to abstract from these "particularities" of *Parzival* without breaking its weave and distorting its intentions.

In the absence of precise traditional data, the question of the house of Anjou remains delicate to interpret. It seems unlikely that Wolfram wished to honour the historical dynasty in particular. That this dynasty borrowed from legend by claiming descent from a fairy does not imply that the legend, too, must have borrowed from history. Even if one granted that Gahmuret might owe some trait to this or that member of the family (Richard the Lionheart has been invoked in this connexion, and at least one of the dukes of Anjou, King Fulk of Jerusalem, was affiliated with the Order of the Temple), it remains that the qualification "Angevin," for Feirefiz as for Gahmuret, is manifestly that of a spiritual race, "faëd" in the sense of predestined (*fata*), whose remote Celtic origins are the same as those of Arthur's race. It was unknown in Kyot's time, since he finds traces of it only in the "ancient chronicles," and we shall recall that, even if Arthur stands at the head of the historical Chronicles of Anjou, it is in any case a lineage other than that from which the Plantagenets were to emerge. Wolfram's Anjou is in fact a legendary Anjou, like its capital, Béalzenan — which does not, moreover, exclude a geographical, if not historical, link with the province of that name.

M. Bodo Mergell seems to us to have brought the beginnings of a solution to this enigma: "The name *Anschouwe*, while derived from that of Anjou," he says, "signifies neither the historical Angevins nor the Anschauer of Styria, but represents, by the very name, an allusion to the vision (*das schouwen, beschouwen*) of the Grail. The spiritual and Christian character of this vision is brought into relief by Feirefiz, also of *Anschouwe* but incapable of seeing the Grail: *an den grâl was er ze sehen blint*; where the same wordplay *Anschouwe-schouwen-an sehen* serves as an

introduction to his baptism...” Further on, this author contributes something extremely interesting towards clarifying this problem by bringing to light a link between Gahmuret’s race and the primordial race: “Mazadan and Terdelaschoye, ancestors of Gahmuret, are another example of that symbolism of names to which Wolfram shows himself devoted: the evocation of the Father of men and of the earthly Paradise (Land of Joy) is evident in those venerable names that allow one to foresee a first notion of the *wunsch von pardis* that is the Grail (22).”

The link with the geographical Anjou is perhaps supplied by this passage from the *Chronicle of Anjou* by Jehan de Bourdigné, canon of the church of Angers (1529): “In Celtic Gaul called Egada (Anjou), several well-born inhabitants, under a benign horoscope and a sweet and temperate part of the sky, devoted themselves to letters and the studies of philosophy, in which they profited so greatly that the rumour immediately spread that throughout all the Gauls there were no more learned theologians than the Egadians. Sarron called them, found them far more learned than had been reported, and dismissed (authorized) them to build a city. They went into the forest of Nid d’Oiseau or of Merle, seeking the place where there were the most little birds, and there they built their city which they called Andes, in the year of the world 2000 and after the Flood the year 344.”

Andes was to give its name to the peoples of the lower Loire, Andécavi or Andegavi, whence Anjou. Sarron is the third king of the dynasty of Japheth, son of Noah, who reigned, according to tradition, over the North and East of Gaul. Chosen people, foundation of a “city,” significant symbols (the Nest is a symbolic equivalent of the Heart and of the Cup; the Birds represent the angels or higher states of Being): one has here, incontestably, the account of the foundation of a spiritual Centre, said to go back to three centuries after the Flood... Perhaps one must even see between the Merle and Merlin one of those linkages, not etymological but by assonance, that are common in traditional symbolism.

To conclude this question, we shall finally cite the following lines from the late L. Charbonneau-Lassay, particularly well informed about the traditions of that region of France: “... there were three principal centres where the cult of the Grail — if one may speak thus — was particularly intense: the centre of Ireland and England, Somerset and Glamorgan; the centre of western France, Anjou, Poitou, Brittany; the Franco-Spanish centre north and south of the Eastern Pyrenees (23).”

But what constitutes the true singularity of *Parzival* is, on the one hand, the attribution to the Templars of the guardianship of the Grail, and on the other hand what M. Jean Frappier calls its “Arabic and oriental side.” This latter, which we shall address first, appears in many details, of which we shall give only a few characteristic examples: the clothing of the Grail maidens, the cloak of Repanse de Joye, the *achmardi* cloth (a transcription of the Arabic *azzamradi*, or better *az-zumurrud(ah)*, emerald) upon which she bears the most holy Object, the silk substitute for the Round Table, are made of precious “pagan” cloth, and this origin forms an integral part of their symbolism. The proof of the quality or virtue of arms, horses, metals, stones — these too laden with symbolic meanings — is constantly supported by their Arab provenance. The planets whose course delineates Parzival’s future kingdom are designated by their Arabic name. Cundrie, messenger of the Grail, knows Arabic and says she is in the service of Secondille, “pagan” queen

of the Indies. Not only does Arthur admit “pagans” (Ecuba, queen of Janfouse; Feirefiz) to take their place at the Round Table, the place par excellence reserved, but Feirefiz is received at Montsalvage and into the intimacy of the Grail without his quality as Muslim posing any problem whatsoever.

In striking contrast with other contemporary works, one finds — apart from this or that stance of a purely theological order and visibly imposed — no mark of hostility towards Islam, but on the contrary many indications, and among the most apparent, of admiration and respect for its spirit and its civilization.

But however astonishing such an attitude may appear if one recalls that the work was written at the time of the Fifth Crusade, the interest might seem merely curious if the author did not provide, as to his true thought, clarifications of an altogether different scope. We read in Book I that Gahmuret, Parzival’s father and younger brother of the king of Anjou, refuses the appanage that the latter offers him, and Wolfram indicates the motive:

“Yet this hero, so well instructed in all propriety, did not think there existed in the world any crowned sovereign — king, emperor, or empress — whose servant he ought to be. He wished to serve only Him who exercises supreme power over all the kingdoms of the earth. Such was the resolve he bore in his heart. Now he learned that at Baghdad there reigned a caliph so powerful that his authority extended over two thirds of the earth, or even beyond. The pagans venerated him so greatly that they called him in their language the ‘baruk’. He had made himself master of so many peoples that he counted among his vassals numerous kings; though these kings wore crowns, they were nonetheless subject to him. This power and this dignity of caliph still exist today. Just as at Rome they watch over the observance of the Christian principles taught us by the religion of our baptism, in that country one obeys a pagan law. At Baghdad the inhabitants receive from their pope the benefits they are entitled to expect from him; ... it is the ‘baruk’ who grants them remission of their sins... At that time the young prince of Anjou arrived. The caliph took great affection for him, and Gahmuret, the valiant knight, offered him his services and became his mercenary (24).”

Thus Gahmuret (son, like Arthur, of a “faëd,” predestined race, Wolfram indicates elsewhere), in order to fulfil his vow of celestial chivalry, enters the service of the highest spiritual authority known — and that authority is Islamic. Wolfram identifies it with the caliph of Baghdad, but his title of Baruk (the “Blessed” in Hebrew; in Arabic *al-Mubārak* or *Mabrūk*) and the nature of his powers reveal in him an authority of a much deeper order, and of a distinctly polar character, whose jurisdiction, extending over “two thirds of the earth and even beyond,” moreover seems to overflow the framework of Islam. The word Caliph (*al-Khalīfah*) can be understood at once in the sense of “successor of the Prophet” and of “lieutenant of Allāh.” If Baghdad is the seat of the Caliph, it is also symbolically, for Muḥyiddīn Ibn ‘Arabī, that of the “supreme Pole, perfect manifestation of the form of the Divinity.” The word Baghdad means in Iranian “gift of God.” It has seven variants, of which that employed by the Shaykh al-Akbar, Bughdan, has the same meaning. Another name for Baghdad is *Dār as-Salām*, the “House of Peace,” which is also a designation of the supreme spiritual Centre. Now here is what Muḥyiddīn says on this subject: “The land of Allāh most beloved to me after Taybah (Medina), Mecca and Jerusalem, is the city

of Bughdan. Why should I not desire ‘Peace,’ when there is found the Imam who directs my religion, my intelligence and my faith” (*Tarjumān al-Ashwāq*, ch. XXXVIII). This last sentence could, without change, be placed in the mouth of Parzival’s father. And one will then be able to understand how Gahmuret, though Christian and remaining so, could place himself in the service of the supreme Islamic authority in order to realize his spiritual vocation: it is that this authority, although exercised normally within the framework and by the means of Islam, stood — by its degree and by this or that aspect of its function — beyond the distinction of traditional forms.

In the name of this authority, he fights victoriously in Morocco, in Persia, in Syria, in Arabia. He delivers the Moorish kingdom of Zazamane, puts an end to an entire system of conflicts in which, notably, Christian princes are implicated, and marries Queen Belacâne, “black as night,” by whom he begets Feirefiz, the black-and-white knight. Then, secretly leaving Belacâne and the East, he comes to Wales, where he likewise brings peace by marrying Queen Herzeloïde, “bright as the light of the sun,” sister of the Grail’s “maimed” king, and by whom Parzival will be born. But he must soon answer a call from the Caliph (proof that in all these labours he remained his mercenary), and he dies in the East fighting for him.

The task of the “pure hero” will have been the pacification of East and West, but above all the preparation of a higher work, symbolized by the seed cast into each of the two rival traditional regions, in the persons of the two half-brothers, of a principle of restoration and reconciliation apparently double, but which will be recognized as one at the final act of the Adventure, immediately bringing about the denouement. After his first failure at the Grail Castle, condemned to a wandering of five years, Parzival disappears from the poem for more than 6,000 lines (25). Apart from one or two fleeting and purely incidental appearances, he does not return to the stage until he meets, without knowing him, his brother Feirefiz.

Then comes an “fearsome and prodigious” combat in which they cannot defeat one another — and in which, moreover, Feirefiz seems indeed to have the advantage in wisdom and generosity. This combat ends only through their recognition as sons of one and the same father, and more still as members of a spiritual triad conscious of itself: “My father and you and I myself,” says Feirefiz, “were only one same being in three persons.” If one objects that Feirefiz invokes Jupiter and Juno in this connexion, one will repeat here what was said of Flégétânis. If, moreover, this were not merely a cover, the attribution of Greco-Latin divinities to Feirefiz would be contradictory not only with his quality as a Muslim knight but also with the fact that he is a “pure hero without stain”: the spiritual impurity of polytheism is in itself a disqualification which, by the necessity of the symbolism itself, could not allow him to stand victoriously against the purest of Christian heroes, nor to sit at the Round Table, nor to enter with him at Montsalvage, where only the elect are admitted.

Wolfram, moreover, is careful to leave no ambiguity as to his true thought regarding the bond that unites the two heroes, and consequently regarding the meaning of their combat and its consequences: “These two,” he says, “are only one. My brother and I are only one single being.” A little further on, he not only unites them, but does not distinguish them in an invocation to God: “For I tell you, these two are only one,” therefore “this vow (may God come to the aid of Gahmuret’s son) I form for both of them, for the pagan (*heiden*) as for the Christian (26).”

One knows what follows: immediately after the combat, Cundrie comes to announce to Arthur's camp that the Stone has designated Parzival as king of the Grail. Parzival, who has the right to take only one companion to Montsalvage, chooses his brother above all the knights present, including the initiates of the Round Table. It is only inside Montsalvage, in the very Centre, that Feirefiz will submit to baptism in order to marry Repanse de Joie, which will enable him to see the holy Stone with his own eyes. Twelve days later he returns to his kingdom of the Indies, near the earthly Paradise, where Repanse de Joie will give birth to a son who will be called Prester John.

Later, according to Albrecht's *Titurel*, continuator of Wolfram, Parzival, with the Templars of Montsalvage, will leave Europe, increasingly given over to sin, to join Feirefiz in the Indies, and will obtain from God that Montsalvage and the Grail be transported there. It is therefore, beyond contest, a reabsorption of the Grail Centre into the spiritual Centre designated by the name "Kingdom of Prester John," as is moreover confirmed by the fact that Parzival then assumes the title and function of Prester John.

One cannot mistake the meaning of this combat: the two timeless heroes are the exemplary types, the essence, of Christian and Arab chivalries. Now the requirement of chivalric symbolism is that victory should belong to the one who prevails in truth and virtue. If they cannot defeat one another, is it not that the forces that inspire them are equal? And if the fruit of their combat is unity, is it not that they are the same? If it were not so, the Grail — which Wolfram invokes in Parzival's favour ("Turn aside this peril, O noble and mighty Grail!") — would be held in check by something other than the Grail. This combat of recognition is therefore indeed that of two principles which, having proved themselves equal in virtue when the armour of their outward form was closed, break that form only to discover their identity.

This is what Wolfram suggests when he says, through the mouth of Gawain: "Since you have faced one another weapon in hand, you know better than before what men you are." One recognizes here, applied to Christianity and Islam, the traditional conception of War and Peace as the "resolution of oppositions."

But it goes without saying that this archetypal battle does not take place on the earthly plane. It is in reality a pure spiritual operation from which Parzival will emerge changed, and which corresponds exactly, under the two aspects micro- and macrocosmic, to that "conjunction" which the alchemists define as the "reunion of repugnant and contrary natures in perfect unity." This combat, which is Parzival's last adventure, is in itself a culmination, for it marks the end of his "labyrinthine" wandering and closes the cycle of the Quest, to the point that what follows appears as a simple denouement and almost as a formality.

It completes, moreover, the manifestation of that triad in which, in a certain sense at least, Wolfram wished — like other Grail actors — to evoke the "blessed Trinity." One may ask whether, within this triad, and taking account of the "Solomonic" traits that, as we shall see further on, some have recognized in Gahmuret, Wolfram did not wish also to signify that of the three traditions of Abrahamic origin. In any case, Feirefiz's appearance at the end of the Adventure — his action "crystallizing" and sanctioning the results of the Quest, and making it

possible for them to bring the hoped-for fruit — has something of the “paracletic” role attributed to Islam in relation to the two prior traditions.

Since this fruit is Parzival’s access to the ultimate goal in order to pose the liberating question, the effective becoming-conscious of the essential unity of Christianity and Islam (and, implicitly at least, of Judaism) is thus posed, as plainly as possible, as a condition for the restoration of the Grail’s sovereignty — that is, for the accomplishment of that “imperial mystery” from which the Middle Ages awaited for centuries, and finally in vain, the salvation of the West.

This conclusion may surprise. Yet here is a proof that seems all the more decisive because the author has very consciously woven it himself into the very fabric of his narrative: the symbolic value of the combat tends to realize a prototypical binary which finds, in its own balance, the revelation of its unity. This corresponds to a simple but fundamental metaphysical notion, namely that the equilibrium of any pair whatever is a sufficient sign of the transcendent unity beyond the distinction of its terms. When two spiritual realities and functions are at issue, this unity is that of the Principle itself, and the real “place” of its manifestation is that point at the centre and beyond space and time which the various traditions designate by the names “Centre of the World,” “Land of Peace,” “Invariable Middle.” This “place” is also that of the Grail, which is thus virtually conquered by the two partners of the prodigious combat, henceforth indissociable.

But, on the other hand, this binary explicitly forms part of a ternary, that is, of another system of equilibrium: that of that “same being in three persons” of which Feirefiz speaks, and which presents itself in the form of a triangle with upper point, of which Gahmuret — father, or immediate principle of the other two — occupies the apex. This figure is that of the initiatic triangle, which is, in universal symbolism, one of the signs of the Pole.

Christian and Masonic symbolisms inscribe at its centre the Tetragrammaton or the Hebrew Yod, the divine Name par excellence, as sign of the divine Presence (in Hebrew *Shekhinah*, corresponding to the Messiah as Emmanuel or “God in us”). The Yod is alphabetically the origin of letters, and hieroglyphically the principle of all things. Its seat at the centre of the triangle is the point where the Axis of the World, vector of the “Will of Heaven,” reaches the plane of the existence in question and manifests itself there. It is therefore the central opening onto the Manifested and onto the Principle. This is why it is also called the “All-seeing Eye.” The upright triangle is a symbol of the Principle in direct analogy. In inverse analogy, or by reflection in the Manifested, its point being downward, it yields a figure that is, very generally, the geometrical schema of the Heart and of the Cup. The Yod is likewise inscribed there, either as “germ of immortality” or as opening onto the Principle.

In this latter case, it is the “Eye of the Heart” that sees God directly, or again the divine Wound in the Heart, which medieval symbolism linked to that of Christ’s Heart pierced by Longinus’s lance, from which Water and Blood sprang — the Fountain of Life whose flow Joseph of Arimathea gathered in the Holy Vessel. This symbolism is directly connected to that of the Grail along the two conceptual directions defined respectively by the Cup and by the Stone: the first, more especially Christic, through the Wound, represented in medieval iconography, in association with the Vessel, as an isolated theme of contemplation; the second, through the

intimate relations between the Yod and the *lapsit exillis*, the Yod being at once “descended from Heaven” (as present in the Manifested), “germ of immortality,” and “All-seeing Eye” (which, depending on its location, is either the “frontal eye,” or “third eye,” corresponding to the emerald fallen from Lucifer’s forehead, or the “Eye of the Heart”).

One can already perceive that the Wound and the Cup — though they form an integral part of the theme of the Passion — belong to a symbolism that is far from being specifically Christian, and that corresponds, on the contrary, to a very precise doctrine in the Hebrew and Islamic traditions concerning the Heart as the dwelling-place of the divine Presence (in Hebrew *Shekhinah*, in Arabic *Sakīnah*). In the latter in particular one finds again the notions of the “open Heart” (*al-qalbu-l-maftūḥ*) and the “Eye of the Heart” (*‘aynu-l-qalb*), the latter both as the organ of the divine Vision, and — by the second meaning of the word *‘ayn* — as “Fountain of immortality” (*‘aynu-l-khuld*). Likewise the Stone, as principle and germ of immortality, has mediated analogues in the Hebrew and Islamic *luz* and in the Philosophers’ Stone. But beyond this, as regards more specifically Wolfram’s *lapsit exillis*, one will see further on that the whole configuration of the mystery as he describes it — so strange within the Celtic and Christian context of the legend — finds rigorous Islamic correspondences in the symbolism of the Pole and that of the hierarchy of the degrees of universal Existence (27).

Such are, briefly set out, the organic links between the upright triangle, the inverted triangle, and their common centre, and the few considerations one may draw from them for our purpose. Let us recall in passing that their superposition gives the well-known figure of Solomon’s seal, a representation of the Universal Man. We shall now return to the upright triangle in order to point out that the principal ternary of which it is the symbol is traditionally expressed in that of the supreme initiatic functions, and secondarily as a type of hierarchical organization of the various traditions. Thus it is found again in Islam with the *Qutb al-Ghawth*, or supreme Pole, assisted by the two Imams of the Right and of the Left (28). Now the triad Gahmuret–Feirefiz–Parzival — that “same being in three persons” centred upon the Grail — is itself an initiatic ternary. And this is, finally, what gives all its meaning to the spiritual bond contracted by Gahmuret towards the Pole of his time, expressly represented as Islamic. That, we think, is everything that, for Wolfram, Chrétien had kept silent. We shall now examine whether the poem’s central symbolic data come, to some extent, in support of these conclusions.

27 On all this, cf. René Guénon, *Le Roi du Monde*, op. cit., ch. VII; “L’Œil qui voit tout,” in *Études Traditionnelles*, April–May 1948; “Le Grain de Sénevé,” *ibid.*, January–February 1949.

On the sacred Wound in Christian iconography, cf. L. Charbonneau-Lassay, loc. cit.

28 On the three supreme Functions, cf. René Guénon, *Le Roi du Monde*, op. cit., ch. IV.

III Symbolic Correspondences

The first of these data is that of Montsalvage itself, the Mountain of Salvation, where, says Wolfram, one finds “splendours that have no equal on earth.” It is there that the Grail resides,

under the guardianship of knights “as pure as angels.” The profane have no access to it: “Whoever sets his mind on seeking it, unfortunately never discovers it... One must arrive there without having formed the intention.” And “no one can accomplish the Quest of the Grail unless he is held in such esteem by Heaven that he is designated from on High to be admitted into its vicinity.”

Montsalvage is the central Place, the *medium mundi*, the “polar Mountain” of which all traditions speak. It is, in particular, the equivalent of Hyperborean Thule, Celtic Avalon, Hindu Meru, Mazdean Alborj, Mandaean Mshunia Kushta, the Hebrew Luz, the Mount Gerizim of the Samaritans, Greek Olympus, the “Mountain of Precious Stones” mentioned on the Nestorian stele of Si-ngan-fou, to the south of which lies the Kingdom of T’sin or primordial Syria, the Land of Peace. In Islam, it is Mount Qâf, which is the “Mountain of the Saints” (*Jabalu-l-Awlyiâ*), the “White Mountain” (*al-Jabal al-Abyaḍ*) situated in the “Green Island” (*al-Jazīrah al-Khaḍrâ*), and which one cannot reach “either by land or by sea” (*lā bi-l-barr wa lā bi-l-baḥr*) (29).

For Christianity as for Judaism, the *medium mundi* was identified with the Hill of Zion. But, within Judaism itself, this was only a secondary localization, and certain Hebrew texts preserve traces of a primitive tradition concerning the polar situation of the Tree of Life and the holy Mountain (30). It seems, moreover, that an analogous tradition existed in medieval Christianity, to which the mention of the *Mons victorialis* in the fragment of the “Book of Seth” preserved in the *Opus imperfectum in Matthaëum* appears to bear witness (31). The *Mons victorialis* is given as the place of origin of the Magi, which leaves no doubt as to its meaning (32).

But it is with the Grail cycle that this notion is incorporated — at least visibly — into properly Christian symbolism. Now, within this cycle itself, there are scarcely more than two works of which one can say that they refer to it directly: Chrétien’s and Wolfram’s. Even then, in Chrétien the reference is wholly implicit, and can be inferred only by analogy with the general symbolism of spiritual centres, and by cross-checking with what Wolfram allows one to detect of the tradition on which they were both dependent. In fact, Montsalvage, within the overall symbolism of the Grail, represents in many respects — together with the *Titirel* that continues the *Parzival* — an isolated teaching in evident contrast with the data of Christian source transmitted by Robert de Boron. We must therefore see to what extent it is akin to the corresponding teaching of Islamic esotericism, since that is, according to what Wolfram lets one understand, Kyot’s first source on this point.

The doctrine to which the symbolism of the polar Mountain is connected is very widespread in Islam; it has remained, in particular, very much alive in Iranian Sufism of Shi’ite tradition, where it was taken up again in the modern period by the Shaykhī and Ishrāqī schools. As Henry Corbin has shown — notably in his penetrating study *Celestial Earth and Resurrection Body*, from which we draw most of the information that follows — this doctrine has close relations with the Mazdean doctrine of the “transfigured Earth,” to the point that the geographer Yāqūt could say that Mount Qâf had formerly been called Alborj.

Qâf is, like Alborj, the Mother of all mountains. It encircles and dominates the universe. For some it is made of a single emerald, from which the celestial azure proceeds; for others, this colour comes from the rock (*ṣakhrāh*) that lies at its base and forms the keystone of the celestial vault. It is towards it that the spiritual hero tends, for it is from it that the vertical way towards Allāh begins (*aṣ-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*). Near it are two emerald cities, built in a quaternary mode like the celestial Jerusalem: Jâbalsâ towards the East and Jâbalqâ towards the West. Above these is a third city, Hûrqaliyâ, which has given its name to the whole of this mysterious Earth. The inhabitants of these cities do not know Iblīs (the Adversary) and are like angels. It is the light of Qâf that illumines them, for here there is “neither sun, nor moon, nor star.” To reach it, one must walk four months in the Darkness, cross many a region beyond the sensible world, and pass through the central point, micro- and macrocosmic, of the Source of Life (to which, let it be said in passing, Wolfram’s Fontaine Salvage corresponds).

Qâf is at once at the centre and at the extremity of the world. It is the boundary between the visible and the invisible, the intermediate and mediating place (*barzakh*) between the terrestrial world (*mulk*) and the angelic world (*malakūt*), the one where “spirits take on bodies and bodies become spiritual,” the world of divine Similitudes, of Archetypes or essential realities of beings and things here below (*‘ālam al-mithāl*, literally the “World of the Model”). This is why Muḥyiddīn Ibn ‘Arabī calls it *Arḍ al-Ḥaqīqah*, the land of Reality, for it is the place of theophanies (*tajalliyāt ilāhīyah*).

This earth, Muḥyiddīn specifies, is made from a remainder of the clay from which Adam was fashioned. It is none other than the earthly Paradise necessarily subsisting, though obliterated from the eyes of fallen man, since it is the immediate and exemplary principle of the existence of this world, and the real place, for every being of this world, of its own truth. This is why it is said that “the clay of every faithful gnostic has been taken from the Earth of his Paradise.” But this primordial clay no longer exists in nature proper (in what Saint Paul calls “this body of death”) except as an essential trace and a simple virtuality. It can henceforth, for the generality of believers, be only the fruit long and harshly sought of the spiritual transmutations of this nature, in which one must first rediscover that essential trace, that ontological memory, of the celestial earth — which is a Stone hidden in the depths of the natural earth. This Stone, the initiatic Means (*al-Iksīr*), God willing, will make it living, then life-giving, and powerful to engender from nature that transfigured body or resurrection body of which it is also said: “The Paradise of the faithful gnostic is his very body (33).”

This summary glimpse of a vast and complex doctrine of sacred geography and spiritual alchemy makes it possible not only to restore by analogy that which Montsalvage, in itself, presupposes, but also to place in its true light the whole eschatology of the Grail. We do not claim, for all that, that the datum of Montsalvage was borrowed just so from Islamic esotericism, in the way a literary theme or a philosophical system may be. The symbolic apparatus of an authentic traditional current — as the Grail current incontestably was — corresponds to an original doctrine, developing of itself and homogeneous with itself. It is necessarily appropriate to the spiritual realities expressed in this doctrine, since it is their reflection and intelligible support. Organically linked to the truth it manifests, and unable to be dissociated from it without losing

all reason for being, a true symbol cannot pass from one traditional form to another except under the spontaneous exigency of that very truth itself, known as such on both sides: it cannot be borrowed, but only transmitted.

This transmission — made possible by the universality inherent in the very nature of symbolism, and of common observation in the great traditional past — is therefore, when it occurs, the mark at once of a point of appeal that is its sufficient reason, and of a real “common act” between the partners on the intellectual and spiritual plane. Even then, the observation of the same symbols in two distinct traditions does not suffice to affirm transmission from one to the other, each being able to have received them separately from the common source of all traditions. Certainty is founded, if at all, only on the particular characteristics with which they may be affected, or on those of the context in which they appear.

Such seems to be the case with the Phoenix, mentioned by Trévrizent in connection with the *lapsât exillis*: “It is,” he says, “by the virtue of this Stone that the Phoenix burns itself and becomes ash; but from these ashes life is reborn; it is thanks to this Stone that the Phoenix accomplishes its moulting to reappear afterwards in its radiance, as beautiful as ever.” This indication is found in none of the other Grail romances, and is given by the holy hermit only as a complement to that of the *lapsât exillis*, to illustrate its singular virtues. The Phoenix plays no role in the economy of the mystery; this is therefore manifestly a precise doctrinal reference — that is, a kind of identifying seal.

The Phoenix (from Greek *phoinix*, “Red”) is a very ancient solar and cyclical symbol, which is never found except in connexion with the symbolism of the Centre of the World. Thus, in Arabic legends, it is said never to alight on earth except at the summit of Mount Qâf. According to Herodotus (II, 73), its homeland is Arabia. It is from there that, every five hundred years, shortly after its birth, it flies to Heliopolis (the “City of the Sun”), where it buries the remains of its father (from which it was born) in the Temple of the Sun. For Tacitus as well (*Ann.* XIV, 28) it is native to Arabia; here the paternal remains are not buried but burned upon the altar of the Sun. Other accounts place it in Syria, in the Indies, in Ethiopia, but these are in fact secondary localizations of the true primordial “Syria” — the Sun’s primordial land of which Josephus speaks — where the first Heliopolis is found. This explains why the immortal Bird was never given as inhabiting Egypt, and why no mention of it is found in the Hermetic texts (34). As for the opinion of the Middle Ages — which above all matters here — it is given by Brunetto Latini in his *Trésor*:

“Phoenix is a bird in Arabia, of which there is no more than a single one in the whole world.”

34 Cf. R. P. Festugière, *La Révélation d’Hermès Trismégiste*, vol. III, Gabalda, Paris, 1953, preface, p. XI.

All of this tends to confirm the connection of the *lapsât exillis* with the oriental — and more especially Arab — symbolism of the Centre of the World, but it is not enough to establish that the mention of the Phoenix in the *Parzival* is the result of an Islamic transmission properly so called. Here the contextual characteristics to which we alluded above come into play. The

Phoenix appears in Wolfram in connexion with a representation of the Grail mystery that has no analogue in the rest of the cycle, and no precise counterpart in any Christian teaching. One recalls that this mystery is evoked under the species of a Stone, come down from Heaven to Earth, the place of theophanies, whose link with its Origin and whose operative virtues are maintained and renewed once a year, on Good Friday, by a “little host all white” brought down from Heaven upon it by a Dove. At the time of its ritual presentation, this Stone is borne upon a cloth of *achmardi* fabric, emerald in colour, and set down before the Grail King upon a table of *grânât Jachant* (red hyacinth).

Support and means of the divine Presence, it necessarily stands at the central ontological point of the World and of Man; and one understands why the Phoenix has in it the principle of cyclical perpetuation; and why also, although wholly present on earth, there is between it and the world of ordinary consciousness that metaphysical boundary which one can cross only by a particular decree of God and if one has become “as pure as the Angels.” One will already have noted the fairly characteristic relations between the *lapsît exillis* and the emerald Rock (*ṣakhrāh*) of the land of Qâf — relations which, moreover, will appear more clearly later on. But beyond this, one finds in Islamic metaphysical cosmology a symbolism whose similarity of arrangement and whose detailed correspondences with Wolfram’s are such that one could not see in them mere coincidences.

Without wishing to develop here this very complex doctrine, we shall specify, following Muḥyiddīn Ibn ‘Arabī, that the hierarchy of the degrees of universal Existence comprises, in descending series: the First Intellect (*al-‘Aql al-Awwal*); the Universal Soul (*an-Nafs al-Kullīyah*); the Universal Nature (*aṭ-Ṭabī‘ah al-Kullīyah*); primordial Matter or Hylē (*al-Hayūlā* or *al-Habā’*); the Universal Body (*al-Jism al-Kull*).

These are, of course, cosmological principles, not states of manifestation. The First Intellect, also called *ar-Rūḥ* (the Spirit), is the first existentialisation of the divine Essence, the immediate Principle of Manifestation, and consequently the universal Mediator, with whom the Prophet is esoterically identified. It is by its illuminating descent upon primordial Matter that the other cosmological principles or degrees are produced and ordered, and the Universal Soul is its first manifestation, its receptacle and its support. The presence of primordial Matter within this hierarchy is explained by its direct causal relation with respect to the Universal Body. But in reality — as the Shaykh al-Akbar moreover specifies — inasmuch as it is the universal plastic principle or substantial pole of all Manifestation (of which Universal Nature is the determination in relation to the cosmos), it lies outside the succession of the cosmological degrees.

It is in conformity with this latter point of view that the *Rasā’il Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā’* (Encyclopaedia of the Brethren of Purity) define the fundamental quaternary of Manifestation by considering pure Being (as Creator, *al-Bārī*), primordial Hylē, and, between them as second and third term, the First Intellect and the Universal Soul. Be that as it may, each of these terms or degrees is represented, in a very general way, by symbols — birds, stone, colours — which are, respectively: for the First Intellect, the Eagle (‘*Uqāb*), the White Pearl (*Durrah Baydā’*); for the Universal Soul, the Dove (*Warqā’*), the Green Emerald (*Zumurrudah Khaḍrā’*); for primordial

Matter, the Phoenix (‘*Anqā*’); for the Universal Body, the Raven (*Ghurāb*), the Black Jet (*Sabajah Sawdā*’).

Moreover, the Universal Soul is often represented by the Red Hyacinth (*Yāqūtah Hamrā*’), “inasmuch,” says Jurjānī, “as its luminosity is mingled with the obscurity of attachment to the Body,” which corresponds, in sum, to an intermediate cosmological degree. It is in this sense that Muḥyiddīn, in a “Prayer upon the Prophet,” designates our lord Muḥammad as “the White Pearl that descends upon the Red Hyacinth.”

One finds here again not only the Phoenix, with its characteristics of elusiveness, permanence, and cyclical renewal from its own “ashes” (the word *Habā*’, which designates — along with *Hayūlā*, transcribed from Greek ὕλη — primordial Matter, properly means “impalpable dust”) under the action of the divine Intellect, but all the other elements of Wolfram’s schema: the “little host all white,” under an almost identical figuration and in an evident symbolic correspondence; the Dove and the Stone, which here reveal themselves as two correlative aspects of one and the same spiritual reality, to be compared with another teaching from the same doctrinal fund: that of the Emerald Tablet concerning the two parts — one superior and “volatile,” the other inferior and “fixed” — of the Philosophers’ Stone (35). Nor is it even the table of *grânât Jachant* whose link with the *lapsît exillis* is not made explicit by that of the Red Hyacinth with the Green Emerald.

One may add yet another remark: namely that the Phoenix, although invoked by Trévrizent to illustrate the virtues and functions of the Grail, remains outside its cosmological system — just as primordial Matter, insofar as it is the lower pole of Manifestation, is in reality outside the succession of its degrees. Add that one can still discern a series of correspondences with another well-known symbolism in Islam, connected with the preceding: that which represents the First Intellect and the Universal Soul under the respective species of the Pen or supreme Reed (*al-Qalam al-A’lā*, another designation of the Prophet) and the Guarded Tablet (*al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūz*), according to this saying of our lord Muḥammad: “The first thing God created is the Pen; He created the Tablet and said to the Pen: Write! It replied: What shall I write? (God) said to it: Write my Knowledge of Creation until the Day of Resurrection. — Then the Pen traced what it was commanded.”

The divine Words are likewise inscribed upon the *lapsît exillis*: it too is the Receptacle of Writing (*Maḥallu-t-Tadwīnī wa-t-Tastīr*). If, because of other symbolic exigencies, it does not formally reproduce the horizontality of the Tablet, this aspect — besides being implied by its passivity with respect to the Principle — is evoked by its support, the *achmardi* cloth (whose emerald colour is precisely that of the Universal Soul), and is in fact realized by the table of *grânât Jachant*, the immediately lower cosmological degree.

Let us note finally that, in Islamic Hermeticism, according to a different symbolic sense, the Phoenix is a representation of the “Red Sulphur” (*al-Kibrīt al-Aḥmar*), or of the being who has reached the completion of the Work, that is, the realization within himself of the “Universal Man” (*al-Insān al-Kāmil*) (36). According to this latter line of interpretation — not exclusive, of

course, of the first — one would have to see in Trévrizent's mention of the sacred Bird one of the marks of the Grail's magisterium belonging to the order of the "Great Mysteries."

35 Here is what Hortulanus says in his commentary on the Emerald Tablet: "Next he (Hermes Trismegistus, Father of the Philosophers) touches upon the operation of the Stone, saying that what is below is like what is above. This is said because the Stone is divided into two principal parts by the Magistery; namely, the upper part which rises upward, and the lower part which remains below, fixed and clear. And yet these two parts agree in virtue." The non-fixed or volatile part of the Stone must separate the fixed part and raise it, so that "the whole Stone, by the virtue of the Spirit, is borne upward, sublimating it and making it subtle." Then the Stone, volatile, must again be fixed. "And thus it receives the force of superior things by sublimating, and of inferior things by descending; that is to say, what is corporeal will be made spiritual in the Sublimation, and the spiritual will be made corporeal in the Descent or when the Matter descends" (*Bibliothèque des Philosophes chimiques*, Paris, 1741, vol. I).

36 This epithet of "Red Sulphur" has been applied to Muḥyiddīn Ibn 'Arabī.

All this leads us to examine more closely the datum of the *lapsit exillis* in itself. One knows that the designation of the Grail under this form has no Celtic or Christian reference; it moreover constitutes an isolated fact in the legendary corpus of the Grail, upon which criticism has not finished reflecting (37). The affinities it presents with the "Black Stone" of the Kaaba are all the more remarkable. The Grail Stone was brought to earth by angels, and it will later be carried away to the Indies, where the earthly Paradise was then situated. It is the Eucharistic principle upon which the elect feed exclusively. It heals illnesses, preserves youth, wards off death. It draws men in great numbers, but no one discovers it outside the predestined. It itself designates, by a miraculous inscription, the members of the holy community and the Grail kings.

The Kaaba Stone was brought down from Heaven by Jibrā'īl, the Angel Gabriel. It is, according to a *ḥadīth*, the right Hand of God upon earth. It will return to Paradise on the Day of Judgement. It has a healing power, diminished however by the touch of sinners. It is the "magnet" of men. It sees and it speaks; it will bear witness on the Last Day. Esoterically, it is it that names the Imāms (38).

There is therefore similarity, both in origin, nature and destination, and in preservative and oracular virtues. The only difference, from the qualitative point of view, concerns the Eucharistic virtue which naturally specifies the Christian symbol. There is another difference, however, and a very important one from the functional point of view: whereas the Grail is purely esoteric, the Black Stone assumes in addition the corresponding aspect and role on the exoteric plane. Their relation is therefore real but indirect, the homologue of the *lapsit exillis* being rather the Stone of the celestial Kaaba, archetype of the Black Stone. The latter too is the object of an initiatic pilgrimage, or a Quest, and it is with it that the Ismā'īlī esoteric schools identify the Imām.

Henry Corbin cites in this connexion the following passage from Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *Dīwān* in his study of that author: "You were telling me: in such a place there is a Noble Stone; whoever accomplishes his pilgrimage there is sanctified by experience. Āzar (father of Abraham) called to the worship of idols, and you to the worship of a Stone. In truth, you are therefore now for me

Āzar.” Henry Corbin comments on this passage as follows: “The Quest of the Imām is the Quest of the Stone (like the Grail), ‘Stone’ preserved in the Kaaba, not in the cubic edifice situated at Mecca in Arabia, but in the celestial Mecca of the Angels, the *Dār al-Ibdā*’ (39).”

The correspondences do not stop there. Thus the Kaaba Stone is commonly called the “Stone of the Corner” (*Hajar ar-Rukn*). But this is not only a matter of its position in the sacred building: in his *Pèlerinage à la Mekke*, Gaudefroy-Demombynes in fact indicates that “when Abraham builds the House of Allāh, which disappeared at the time of the Flood, he easily finds all the stones he needs, except one which he vainly asks of Ismā‘īl: it is the stone that will complete the building and will be its essential point (40).” This Stone is Allāh himself who gives it to him through the intermediary of Jibrā‘īl, to form the “Corner” of His House. It has not always been black: according to a *ḥadīth* reported by Tha‘lab, when Allāh caused Adam to descend to the place of the Kaaba, “He likewise sent down the Black Stone, which (at that time) shone like a White Pearl.”

The Corner in question is in reality the “Corner of corners” (*Rukn al-Arkān*), a designation which, in a vaulted building, is applied to the keystone, which likewise corresponds to the principle of the building, in relation to which the latter is ordered. This symbolism is rigorously parallel to that of the Cornerstone of the Scriptures, which is also the keystone (the *keystone* in English Freemasonry) or the Head, the completion of the building (the *capstone*). Now, as René Guénon has shown, the *lapsit exillis* is symbolically identified with the Cornerstone, descended from Heaven like it. The host that descends upon it each Good Friday underscores its immediate relation with the “Bread descended from Heaven” as also with the “right Hand of God (41).”

Let us specify, moreover, that the word *rukṇ* also has the sense of “foundation.” It is in this sense that it is generally applied to the various quaternaries; and *Rukn al-Arkān* — which, let it be said in passing, is one of the designations of the Prophet — then represents the fifth, the principle and transcendent reduction of the four: thus, in the cosmological domain, it is the Ether (*al-athīr*) or Quintessence. In alchemical terminology, it designates the Philosophers’ Stone, head and completion of the “secret operation of the Art” (*‘amal al-ṣanā‘at al-maktūm*). The coherence of all this symbolism with that of the *lapsit exillis* will appear clearly if one remembers that Christian Hermetists have often designated Christ both as the true Philosophers’ Stone and as the true Stone of the Corner.

Let us note finally a fact which, were it needed, would authenticate from the documentary point of view all these comparisons. One will no doubt have noticed that the *lapsit exillis* presents itself spontaneously as a vertical projection of the celestial keystone, identical with the emerald Rock (*ṣakhrāh*) that forms the threshold of the land of Qāf. Now here is what Clermont-Ganneau reports in the *Revue d’Histoire des Religions*: “An anonymous account, preserved by Paul the Deacon, describing the *Qoubbet es-Sakhra*, which became the *Templum Domini* of the Crusaders, says that in the middle of the building, above the Rock (the *Sakhra* of the Muslims), there is suspended a golden *candela* in which is the blood of Christ (*super saxum in medio templi pendet candela aurea in qua sanguis Christi*, ap. *It. hierosol.*, p. 108). The legend here clearly aims at the vessel of the holy Grail... (42).”

This traditional convergence is completed by another indication from the same author, namely that, in the period of the Crusades, it was precisely at this place of the *Templum Domini* that the biblical episode of Jacob's Dream was localized — that is to say, in the testimony of that patriarch, “the House of God and the Gate of Heaven (43)” — and that, in the *Sakhra*, there was agreement in recognizing Bethel. This belief did nothing but rejoin the Muslim tradition which venerated in the *Sakhra* Jacob's Stone itself, and the earthly point of departure of the Ladder which, during the Night Journey, served the Prophet, guided by Jibrā'il, for his Ascension (*Mi'rāj*) through the Heavens.

42 *Revue d'Histoire des Religions*, 1920, p. 239.

43 Gen., XXVIII, 10–19. “... Scripture adds: ‘And on that firmament which was above their heads one saw, as it were, a throne that resembled sapphire’ (Ezekiel, I, 26). These words designate the foundation Stone (*shethiyā*) which forms the central point of the whole World and upon which the Holy of Holies (of the Sanctuary of Jerusalem) is based. And what is this foundation Stone? It is the sacred and celestial Throne placed above the four figures engraved on the four sides of the celestial chariot. This throne is symbolized by the traditional Law...” “Scripture says: ‘And this Stone which I have set up as a monument shall be called the House of Elohim’ (Gen., XXVIII, 3). These words designate the foundation Stone which served as the point of departure for the creation of the World, and upon which the Sanctuary was built...” “It is written: ‘But as for me, I shall appear before Thee with Justice; I shall be satisfied when Thou shalt make Thy Glory appear’ (Ps. XVIII, 15). All the love and all the desires of King David had no object other than this foundation Stone (which he designates by the word Justice); and it is to this Stone that David alludes in the words: ‘The Stone which the builders rejected has been placed at the head of the Corner.’ When David wished to contemplate closely the Glory of his Master, he first took this Stone into his hands; and only afterwards could he enter the Sanctuary; for whoever wishes to appear before his Master can reach Him only through this Stone, as it is written: ‘It is with “this” that Aaron entered into the Sanctuary.’” One will observe that the text identifies the foundation Stone and the Cornerstone. They in fact designate the same theophanic Reality, but in two symbolic situations — that is, in two different spiritual functions.

The Lance appears in all the Grail romances; but while its role always has a supernatural character, it is of very unequal importance according to the versions, and none gives it the development it receives in Wolfram. Agent of divine chastisement, it wounds the Grail King not only in his body, but in his ruling function and in the very life of his kingdom, which is struck by a mysterious ill. The wound is exacerbated by the influence of the stars. Every remedy is tried in vain, for “it is God himself who prevents them from acting.” Only the iron that caused it is capable of relieving it. From this iron drops of blood flow ceaselessly. In the Grail procession it appears first and alone, borne by a valet who goes round with it along the four sides of the hall before carrying it away.

In a very general traditional symbolism, the lance is a representation of the Axis of the World, analogous to the Mountain, to the World-Tree, or again to the “axial pillar” of architectural symbolism. The few traits summarized above underscore this axial role: the supernatural wound

inflicted on the King for having departed from his central position; the cosmic expiation that accompanies it, modulated by the rotation of the stars; the ambiguity of its powers; the blood that flows from its iron analogous to the dew that flows from the World-Tree; the rite of the qualification of space. It is the destructive or reductive aspect of the divine Law, of which the Grail itself, Centre of the World, is the dispensing and conserving aspect. That is why it appears as such only as the sanction of a downfall or the judgement of a cycle.

Now the bearer of this lance — “the one who fought against him (Anfortas)... was a pagan born in the land of Ethnise, which is the one from which the Tigris comes out of Paradise. This pagan believed he was sure to conquer the Grail by his valour; he had had the name engraved upon his lance. He sought the distant chivalry; moved by nothing but the power of the Grail (*niht wan durch des grâles kraft*), he traversed seas and lands (44).”

The Lance therefore comes from the confines of Paradise, that is, from the supreme Centre where the primordial Tradition is preserved. The name of the Grail engraved on its iron indicates their essential identity. And its holder, charged with the divine sanction and likewise come from its confines, is a “pagan” knight moved solely by the power of the Grail. Here again one notes a “pagan” intervention at a crucial moment of the Adventure; a beneficial intervention too, despite appearances, for the putting to sleep of an initiatic Centre is always preferable to its going astray. It would be vain, of course, to try to know whether this circumstance corresponds to some precise event. It nonetheless contains an indication whose importance will appear later, in that the lance, in the form of the *vexillum*, was in the Middle Ages the symbol *par excellence* of the Empire.

It is important to note that all this symbolism has no apparent relation — no more here than in Chrétien — with the Chalice of the Supper and the lance of Longinus. This independence is not the least of the enigmas posed with regard to the Grail, if one takes account of the deep resonances awakened in Christendom by the legend of the holy Vessel, and of those aroused, particularly in Provence, homeland of Raymond of Saint-Gilles, by the mysterious circumstances surrounding the intervention of the holy Lance, to which the First Crusade chiefly owed its success. In his *Notes sur le Messianisme médiéval latin*, P. Alphandéry once thought that Kyot might be “an agent of transmission of the Raimondian legend,” and that, “insofar as Welsh influence does not predominate, the messianic hero Raymond of Saint-Gilles will have been, even more than Joseph of Arimathea, the prototype of the Grail kings (45).” In truth, one finds in Wolfram — the only known spokesman of Kyot — no trait of resemblance with this legend, any more than one finds between the *lapsit exillis* and the Vessel of the Holy Blood. That is, in our view, *a contrario*, one of the strongest proofs in favour of the originality and independence of Wolfram-Kyot’s transmission, and of its authentically Islamic source of inspiration — a proof singularly reinforced by the fact that, through this remarkable silence with regard to the symbols of the bodily Passion, the *Parzival* tacitly rejoins the Islamic data which, at least in their ordinary sense (46), exclude the personal crucifixion and the effective death of Christ.

The cyclical role assigned to Good Friday does not contradict this observation; it is probably a factor of the Christian shaping, which, in any case, in no way affects the structure of the symbolism properly so called. This reserve will naturally call to mind the principal head of

accusation against the Temple, that of the ritual spitting upon the cross, and, insofar as one can find it some appearance of foundation, the charge made against the grand masters of having, at the instigation of the Muslims, opened the Rule to foreign doctrines. It will also recall Catharism, and above all Docetism, long widespread in Near-Eastern Christian milieux, as the *Acta Johannis* bear witness, and which in its substance is very close to certain Islamic conceptions. But one must not hasten for that reason to conclude to the heterodoxy of the *Parzival*. In any case, this is a doctrinal position more guessed at than perceived, and it in no way calls into question the scriptural data and the tradition of the Church on this point. The perspective that is sketched there is, like that which inspired the Templar rite of reception, of a purely esoteric order (“the Temple is dead from a symbol not understood,” Michelet rightly said), and refers to the problem of the two natures of Christ, on which we cannot insist here.

There is, between the aforementioned heresies and what can be discerned in Wolfram’s thought, a radical difference: that which separates a current originally initiatic, but denatured by exteriorization and thereby become heterodox by that very fact (the ordinary process of the formation of heresies in the Middle Ages), and an esoteric tradition that has remained regular. The affinities that may subsist between them — even the common possession of certain symbols — do not authorize one to conclude that the second is heretical, but that these elements constitute, for the first, the share of intrinsic truth that it still retains from its primitive regularity, and without which, moreover, it would have no kind of reality at all (47).

One will no doubt ask whether, beyond the very general axial meaning of the Lance, there does not exist in this connection a symbolism more specifically Arabic, in connection with that of the *Parzival*. There is one, in fact, in the Science of Letters, a traditional science with no equivalent in the West, founded on the notion of the Arabic language as a sacred language and a language of Revelation, thus issuing directly from the divine Source of the Word, as an effective means of a spiritual hermeneutic (*ta’wīl*) applied to the Qur’ān. According to this science, the world was created, not by the first letter *alif* (formed by a straight vertical stroke), but by the second, *bā’* (formed by a point surmounted by a curve with upper concavity). In this primordial role, in which it is at once the “means” and the “place” of Creation, the *bā’*, says René Guénon, “represents *Er-Rûh*, the ‘Spirit’, which must be understood as the total Spirit of universal Existence... It is produced by the divine command, and, as soon as it is produced, it is in some way the instrument by which this ‘command’ will operate all things, which will thus all be ‘ordered’ in relation to it; before it, therefore, there was only *el-amr*, affirmation of pure Being and first formulation of the supreme Will, as before duality there is only unity or before the *bā’* there is only the *alif*. Now the *alif* is the polar letter whose form is that of the ‘axis’ along which the divine order is accomplished; and the upper point of the *alif*, which is the ‘secret of secrets’ (*sirru-l-asrâr*), is reflected in the point of the *bā’* insofar as this point is the centre of the ‘first circumference’ which delimits and envelops the domain of universal Existence... (48)”

47 On the *Acta Johannis*, see Festugière, op. cit., vol. IV, pp. 233–238. For the Cathar thesis, see Déodat Roché, *Le Graal pyrénéen; Cathares et Templiers*, in *Cahiers d’Études cathares*, Toulouse, July–September 1949.

48 René Guénon, *Er-Rûh*, in *Études Traditionnelles*, 1938, pp. 287–288. On the Science of

Letters, idem, *La Science des Lettres*, in *Études Traditionnelles*, February 1931; Louis Massignon and Paul Kraus, *Akhbar al-Hallâj*, Laorse, Paris, 1936.

One immediately sees the correspondence between the *lapsît exillis* and the point of the *bā'*: its role as instrument of the divine command appears spontaneously; its principal character is underscored by Wolfram himself when he says that “that perfect thing to which nothing was lacking” was “at once root and flowering,” as is likewise its situation as centre of the first Circumference when he specifies that “all that the planets enclose in their course, all that their rays illuminate, those are the limits of the kingdom (of the Grail).” Likewise the relation of the Lance and the *alif* appears: the iron is essentially identified with the Grail as the point of the *alif* is identified with the point of the *bā'*; and it is to its transcendent character that its wound owes the fact of escaping all remedies of the cosmic domain, of being relieved only by it, and of being healed only by the new “pole” who has himself identified with the axis, Parzival, the one who, in Wolfram’s etymology, “pierces through.” We do not claim, of course, that it is here and there the same symbolism, but only the same meaning of symbols corresponding to one another through geometric symbolism. One will nonetheless grant that such parallels, down to the detail, with a constituted and precise Islamic doctrine can hardly be fortuitous. Let us make in this connection a remark that will no doubt seem rather singular: the first “creation” from the point of the *bā'* is the curve with upper concavity constitutive of this letter itself; now this curve is regarded as a schematic equivalent of the cup. This concordance represents, to our knowledge, the only doctrinal reference in which a perfect coherence of the symbolisms of the Lance, and of the Stone and of the Cup, can be observed.

Let us note finally, to complete these few glimpses, that the ternary formed by the upper point of the *alif* and the two ends of the *bā'*, opposed horizontally, finds an immediate correspondence in the initiatic triangle of which we spoke above. The summit of this triangle is occupied by the supreme Pole (*El-Qutb el-Gawth*) and the two base angles by the two Imāms of the Right and of the Left. René Guénon has pointed out in this connection a significant parallel with the hermetic symbolism of the “cubic stone with a point,” representation of the Philosophers’ Stone, and has shown that, in the axe-shaped figure that it bears at its summit in the old Masonic documents, one must not see a hieroglyph of the Hebrew letter *qoph*, but indeed of its Arabic correspondent, *qāf*. This letter, which has the general sense of force or power, has given its name to the sacred Mountain, and represents, moreover, an abbreviated designation of the Pole (*Qutb*). It is numerically equivalent to *maqām*, seat or station (spiritual). Now it is said that the seat of the supreme Pole is situated symbolically between heaven and earth, at a point vertically above the Kaaba. The figure in question is therefore interpreted, according to René Guénon, as a representation of the Kaaba, Islamic determination of the Centre of the World, surmounted by Mount Qâf, itself bearing at its summit the hieroglyph of the Pole (49). It goes without saying that Christian Hermetism transposed this symbolism in order to apply it to its own magistry. But that takes nothing away — quite the contrary — from the probative value that the exchange of symbols, in itself, carries as regards the deep sharing of the doctrine.

49 René Guénon, *Un hiéroglyphe du Pôle*, ibid., 1937, p. 192. One will note here again that the symbolism of the Pole in *Taşawwuf* is identical with that of the Imām in Ismā‘īlism.

IV Feirefiz

We must now, in order to forestall certain possible objections, return to the question of Feirefiz's baptism. One observes first that Christian baptism does not by itself suffice to open to anyone other than Parzival access to the Grail; whereas, on the contrary, Feirefiz is still "pagan," that is, Muslim, when he crosses the threshold of Montsalvage and is admitted into the proximity of the Grail, which demonstrates two things: namely that he has attained, like Parzival, the necessary spiritual degree, the primordial state; and further, that Islam is implicitly regarded as a possible way of access to the Grail Castle. Montsalvage is at the centre, and consequently beyond particular traditions, failing which Feirefiz could not have entered it without being baptized. There is therefore a radical difference between ordinary baptism and the one he receives there. We have seen above that the same must likewise have been the case with Kyot's baptism. To understand what is exactly at issue here, we shall quote the following lines from René Guénon: "Those who have passed beyond form are, by that very fact, freed from the limitations by which man, fallen from that 'primordial state' into which they are reintegrated, is bound to a determinate form, since all individualities and all forms of the human domain have their immediate principle at the very point where they are placed." René Guénon also writes: "He who has arrived at this point is he who has attained, by a direct and profound knowledge (and not theoretical or verbal), the ground of all traditional doctrines, who has found, by placing himself at the central point from which they emanated, the truth that is hidden there under the diversity and multiplicity of external forms. The difference, in fact, is never anything but in form and appearance; the essential ground is everywhere and always the same, because there is only one truth... and because, as the Muslim initiates say, 'the doctrine of Unity is one' (*Et-Tawhîdu wâhidu*) (50)." Elsewhere the same author evokes the case "of men who, having reached a high degree of spiritual development, can outwardly adopt this or that traditional form according to circumstances and for reasons of which they alone are judges... Those are, by the spiritual state they have attained, beyond all forms, so that what is involved for them is only outward appearances which can in no way affect or modify their intimate reality; they have not only understood... but fully realized, in its very principle, the fundamental unity of all traditions (51)."

50 René Guénon, *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, op. cit., ch. XXXVII.

51 Id., *Initiation et Réalisation spirituelle*, Chacornac, Paris, 1952, p. 87.

These quotations will no doubt make it understood how Feirefiz, though "pagan" and though not having undertaken the *Queste*, could enter fully into Montsalvage, and they also allow one to glimpse the significance of his baptism: what is at issue here is not a rite of conversion but of investiture, and that moreover explains the conditions under which it is received, which would otherwise, in so solemn a circumstance, have something frivolous and shocking. Feirefiz, in fact, does not have himself baptized in order to see the Grail uncovered, as one would expect, but because such is the condition set for the union he desires with Repanse de Joye. Through this union with the virgin bearer of the Grail, he contracts a sacred bond with the virginal power of the Word (or its *Shakti*, to use Hindu terminology), as it manifests itself under the specific form

of the Christian Grail. For that, in view of the originality and internal autonomy of traditions, he must recognize the Grail in this form as he knows it in essence — as his entry into Montsalvage and his participation in its grace demonstrate — and this recognition entails the formal consecration of the Christian rite. He will then be able to ensure, in association with his brother from whom he is not distinguished, more hidden functions that one can nonetheless divine, since, father of Prester John, he will assume before him the role if not the title.

Feirefiz's real quality and function are moreover suggested by his particular complexion, black and white, which makes him a unique being in the world. To make understood what is at issue, we shall refer again to René Guénon: "In the most immediate sense, the juxtaposition of white and black naturally represents light and darkness, day and night, and consequently all pairs of opposites and complementaries (it is scarcely necessary to recall that what is opposition at a certain level becomes complementarism at another level, so that the same symbolism is equally applicable to the one and to the other); one thus has in this respect an exact equivalent of the Far Eastern symbol of the *yin-yang* (52)." Elsewhere, he points out that "in its higher sense, the colour black essentially symbolizes the principial state of non-manifestation, and (that) it is thus that one must understand in particular the name of Krishna in opposition to that of Arjuna which means 'white,' the one and the other representing respectively the non-manifested and the manifested, the immortal and the mortal, the 'Self' and the 'I,' *Paramâtmâ* and *jîvâtmâ*..." Further on, René Guénon adds: "... the centre is, by reason of its principial character, what one could call the 'place' of non-manifestation; as such, the colour black, understood in its higher sense, therefore truly suits it... (53)." Finally, the same author specifies elsewhere, concerning the *yin-yang* sign, that "inasmuch as the *yang* and the *yin* are already distinguished while being united, it is the symbol of the primordial Androgyne," or again of the Universal Man, the Mediator, Pontiff and King *par excellence* (54).

52 Id., *Le Blanc et le Noir*, in *Études Traditionnelles*, 1947, p. 164. This symbolism is developed by pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite in the *Celestial Hierarchy*, XV, 8, concerning the horse: "The form of the horse indicates obedience and docility. If the animal is white, it signifies the brilliance closest to the divine Light; if it is black, the arcanum; if it is bay, the power and activity of fire; if it is piebald, the capacity to serve as a unitive mediator between extremes, and to join providentially, in turn, the superior to the inferior and the inferior to the superior," cited by V.-E. Michelet, *Le secret de la Chevalerie*, Didier et Richard, Paris, 1930.

The etymology of the name Feirefiz is disputed. For Bartsch it means "son of piebald." For Veselovsky, it would mean "true son." According to Helen Adolf, this latter interpretation would be corroborated by a comparison with the legend contained in the sacred book of the Ethiopians, the *Kebra Nagast* ("Book of the glory of God"), where the young prince, son of Bilqis, queen of Sheba, is recognized by Solomon as his "true son." Belacane, wife of Gahmuret and mother of Feirefiz, would be nothing other than a representation of Bilqis (55)... Helen Adolf supports her thesis of the Abyssinian origin of the legend, with transmission by the Arabs, with other facts: thus the original of the *Kebra Nagast*, written in the tenth century, was in Arabic; in the high Middle Ages Abyssinia was called *India*; the name of the kings of Ethiopia was almost always followed by the word *Zan* signifying majesty which, according to her, could easily have been

deformed into *Gian* and might be the origin of the name Prester John. These parallels are interesting in that they seem to confirm the link between the Grail tradition and that of Prester John. But in truth, for the latter it can only be a milestone and not its source, for the Ethiopian version of the Prester John legend is the latest, and certainly later than those that place the kingdom of the mysterious sovereign in Mongolia, in the Indies, or on the Pamir. These different localizations are explained by the fact that this name did not designate an individual or a dynasty, but a function related to the “outer covering” of the Centre of the World and having had several representatives simultaneous or successive. It seems probable moreover that “Ethiopia,” like the “Syria” of the Rosicrucians and the Nestorians, was itself only a secondary and symbolic representation of the “primordial Land.”

We could not, without going beyond the scope of this work, develop all the consequences implied by these few glimpses in which there appears in a particularly clear way the symbolic concordance of the different traditions. They suffice at least to complete the placing of the figure of Feirefiz, who, let us recall, is encountered only in Wolfram and his continuator Albrecht, and to show in him at once an emissary in the qualities of the Centre of the World, and a *paredros* of Parzival, charged, in the final act of the Adventure, with provoking—by the “crystallization” of the work of the *Queste*—its spiritual integration, and through him, that of the Christian West. The two are in truth—and Wolfram leaves no doubt on this point—only complementary aspects of a permanent reality, more or less manifest, of the divine Work, that of the eternal Priesthood; and the Order of the Grail is none other than that of Melchizedek, mysteriously reaffirmed at a certain moment in the history of the West. That this Order exists through time beyond the progressive decadence of the human world, universal and permanent like the essential and unique Truth, present and hidden, which it prophesies; that it was to be realized effectively in history through the accession of the responsible élites of East and West to this Truth and to their own unity in it; that Islam was the predestined agent of this recognition and of this work—this is, we believe, the essential message of the *Parzival*. It remains for us to see from what historical circumstances this message drew its timeliness.

V The Templars

Friedrich von Schlegel declared long ago: “One may admit that these poems (of the Round Table) not only expressed the ideal of a religious knight..., but also contained a great number of symbolic ideas and traditions peculiar to some of these orders, above all to that of the Templars... Of all the German poets of that period, the most skilful was Wolfram von Eschenbach, who, among the stories of the Round Table, particularly chose those about which I observed above that the allegories of religious chivalry they contain must not be regarded as a whim of the author or as a play of his imagination, but on the contrary seem to refer to the symbolic traditions of the Templars (56).”

The identification of the Order of the Grail with that of the Temple in the *Parzival* is indeed beyond doubt. Trevrizent says to Parzival: “Valiant knights have their dwelling at Montsalvage, where the Grail is kept. These are the Templars (*die selben Templeise*); they often ride far away

in search of adventure... They live from a Stone (*sie leben von einem Steine*); its essence is all purity... It is called *lapsit exillis*.” In many passages it is under the name of Templars that Wolfram designates the knights of the Grail. It is in the same way that he will call them later in his fragment of the *Titurel*: “One can, among the Knights of the Temple, see more than one desolate heart—those whom Titurel had more than once drawn out of harsh trials, when his arm defended the Grail chivalrously with the help of theirs (57).” Now, beyond their principal function of ensuring the maintenance and guardianship of the Grail on earth, the Knights of Montsalvage have that of making possible the effective reign of God over the nations by giving them kings chosen by Him: “It sometimes happens that a kingdom is subject to God, and if it desires a king chosen from the company of the Grail, this wish is granted. The people must honour the king thus chosen, for he is protected by God’s blessing. It is in secret that God sends forth His elect.”

This sketch of a theocratic organization of Christendom by means of an initiatic élite uniting in itself the double power, sacerdotal and royal, is none other than that of the Holy Empire, which the heirs of the Order of the Temple found in its succession. One has here the double aspect, ascending and descending, of a mysterious mission whose meaning we shall ask of the one who had the Order’s constitution established, who fixed its rule, and who did not cease to be its protector and its inspirer, at the same time as the highest spiritual authority and the arbiter of Christendom in his time: Saint Bernard designates the Order under the name *milita Dei*, and its members under that of ministers of Christ (*minister Christi*). In such a mouth, these were not empty formulas. For him, as later for Dante, it truly was a holy militia, the private household of God, realizing—by a sort of spiritual paradox that set it apart and above other men—the synthesis of the great antinomies of action and contemplation, in a unique vocation, but in a double renunciation, which is that of the apocalyptic elect: “To Him who has made us kings and priests for God His Father...” (Apoc., I, 6).

For Saint Bernard, the true residence of the *militia Dei* was not of this world; it was the Temple of the spiritual Jerusalem: “It is truly the Temple of Jerusalem that they inhabit also, and, although it is not the same, as regards its construction, as the ancient and much-venerated Temple of Solomon, (theirs) is not inferior in glory... The beauty of the first was made of corruptible things; that of the second is the beauty of Grace, of the pious worship of those who dwell in it, and of the most regular of dwellings (*ordinatissima conversatio*) (58).” One recognizes here as much the Temple of the Grail as the Temple of the Holy Spirit of the Rosicrucians. Jules Michelet says on this point, perceptively but without suspecting the scope of his remark: “This name Temple was not sacred for Christians alone. If it expressed for them the Holy Sepulchre, it recalled for the Jews, for the Muslims, the Temple of Solomon. The idea of the Temple, higher and more general even than that of the Church, hovered in a way above every religion. The Church dated; the Temple did not date. Contemporary with every age, it was like a symbol of religious perpetuity.” The whole symbolism of the Order moreover evokes the double notion of the spiritual Centre, source of the two powers, and of temporal–spiritual mediation: the famous *Beaucéant* or *Baucent* was half black and half white, a colour whose meaning we have seen above, and which is not by mere coincidence attributed to Feirefiz. The white mantle, a sign of investiture, of qualification of state and function, was an exclusive privilege that the Order

sometimes had to defend. “And to no other,” says the Rule, “is it granted to have white mantles, save to the aforesaid Knights of Christ: that those who have abandoned the dark life may, by the example of the white robes, recognize themselves as reconciled to their Creator.” The white robe thus expressly designated them in the secular world as “cut off from the mass of perdition,” according to the words of Innocent III, and ranked, already in this world, among those “clothed in white” who are “before the Throne of God and serve Him day and night in His Temple,” and upon whom “He who sits on the Throne will establish His Presence (Shekinah)” (Apoc., VII, 13–16)—not only as reconciled, but as reconcilers.

The cross with eight rays or eight points with which the mantle was charged added to the central meaning of the cross the mediating symbolism of the number eight, just as it united to the white of Knowledge the red of Holy Love invoked in their war-cry. This double aspect of central habitation and sacerdotal mediation appears again in the choice, as psalm of investiture, of Psalm 132 of the Roman psalter: *Ecce quam bonum et quam jucundum habitare fratres in unum...* One finds it likewise in the particular architecture of the sanctuaries of the Temple, which for the most part were built in a circular, trinitarian, and radiating mode, in memory, it is said, of the Holy Sepulchre, but more probably still in the image of the Centre of the World of which the latter was a figuration. It was on this type—let us note in passing—that the Temple of the Grail was built according to Albrecht’s *Titarel*. The electoral college of the Grand Master was formed of twelve members, in the image of the college of the Apostles and of the inner circle of spiritual Centres in general. The ternary of the supreme Functions was itself reproduced at the head of the Order’s hierarchy: the Master was required by the Rule to have “two knight-brothers as companions, who must be such worthy men that they cannot be excluded from any council where there will be five brothers or six.” The seal of the Order, with the two riders on the same mount—or rather the double rider—evokes the synthesis of the double in the Simple, of creaturely duality in the unity of its Principle, and was therefore only another symbol of the Mediator as the means and “place” of Manifestation. The horse itself is well known as the symbolic vehicle of travels between worlds, and one may recall here the mare *El-Boraq* who served the Prophet, accompanied by the Angel Gabriel, during part of the Night Journey.

Let us finally note, among the all too rare vestiges of the Temple’s esoteric doctrine, that earthen vessel discovered in Florence in 1863 on the site of a church of the Order dedicated to Saint Paul, and on which one reads the inscription: *Expelles lapide hoc Pauli virtute venenum*. There is little doubt that this alludes to the enigmatic affliction evoked in II Cor., XII, 7, and to the words of II Cor., IV, 7: “We carry this treasure in earthen vessels”; and, on the other hand, to the stone that the vessel in question was to contain. Perhaps it is not too venturesome to recognize in the latter the *lapis el-iksîr*, or Philosophers’ Stone, the microcosmic aspect of the *lapsît exillis*, if one recalls that in certain symbolisms, such as that of the initiatic confraternity of the *Etoile Internelle*, the Grail is figured in the form of a cup containing a carbuncle, image of the divine Blood (59).

One of the most striking traits of the virtue of the “holy Militia,” as well as of the Middle Ages’ spiritual readiness, is the privileged, inviolable, and sovereign situation that popes, princes, and peoples spontaneously agreed to secure for it within the Christian order. However sensitive the

Christian community then was to sacred signs and influences, such an agreement could not have come about and maintained itself for nearly two centuries, against civil and religious rights and interests as diverse as they were powerful, unless evidence here possessed a constraining force: the Temple did not merely claim to be, but was, in everyone's eyes, the "private household of God."

As early as 1128, ten years after its foundation in obscurity and poverty, a council was convened specifically to define its constitution, fix its rule, and confirm to its members the "habit they themselves had taken." As early as 1129 or 1130, Saint Bernard, defining their mission in the *De Laude*, at the request of the one he called *carissimus meus Hugo*, Hugues de Payns, the first Grand Master, made clearly understood the true nature of their combat, and that bodily war was only its occasion and symbol. As early as 1139, in the bull *Omne datum optimum*, Innocent II declared: "Knights of the Temple, it is God Himself who has constituted you defenders of the Church and assailants of the enemies of Christ," and definitively fixed their statutes and prerogatives, to which his successors would always add without ever subtracting. As early as 1128, the queen of Portugal gave them the castle of Source, granted them the territory of Cera, which they took from the Saracens and where they founded three towns—Coïmbre, Rodin, and Ega—whose churches were directly subject to Rome. Around the same time the count of Barcelona and Provence, Raymond Bérenger III, took the Temple's "glorious habit" and gave it his castle of Grañena, on the frontier march, which he held "by force of arms." In 1131, Alfonso I of Aragon bequeathed to it a third of his kingdom—a bequest that rightly reminds Mme Marion Melville, in her excellent work on the life of the Templars, from which we draw these details, of Wolfram's "masterless kingdom," with which one may also compare the founding of towns on the Portuguese march already mentioned, or that of boroughs on "waste lands" in England (Temple Bruer in Lincolnshire, Baldock in Hertfordshire) (60).

"The most magnificent privileges were granted them," says Michelet. "First, they could be judged only by the pope; but a judge placed so far away and so high up was hardly ever appealed to; thus the Templars were judges in their own causes. They could even be witnesses in them, so great was faith in their loyalty. They were forbidden to grant any of their commanderies at the solicitation of great men or kings. They could pay neither duty, nor tribute, nor toll (61)."

Let us specify that recourse to the pope took place only for external causes. The brothers were answerable only to the Grand Master, and he to the General Chapter. As for the Order itself, it was sovereign and held itself superior to princes. No one, lay or ecclesiastical, could claim the homage of the Grand Master. Its establishments were inviolable, possessed the right of sanctuary, were free of all taxes, and under the direct protection of the Holy See. No prelate could place them under interdict, any more than excommunicate a Templar. Any offence against the Order or its members was reserved to Rome.

"The Grand Master was not confirmed by the Apostolic See," writes Marion Melville, "but his election alone assured him full right of exercise." His authority was absolute, and his orders were regarded as sacred and proceeding immediately from God. The Rule likewise was the object of a respect which, says the same author, "strangely resembles that of Islam for the Qur'an." The brothers could confess only to priests who were members of the Order, for, says the Rule, "they

have greater (*greignor*) power, from the apostle, to absolve them, than an archbishop.” Even then, chaplains had competence only for matters strictly religious; the others fell under the hierarchy. These chaplains were subject to the Grand Master “as to their prelate,” and, apart from him, were answerable only to the pope. But the obligation of secrecy regarding doctrine and initiatic rites did not spare Roman authority; and it is not without reason, it seems, that the Order was reproached with exercising the power of absolution and the power of the keys (62). Every mediation involves both participation and freedom. Now there is scarcely a historical example where one sees a deeper and broader participation in the spiritual and temporal economy of a traditional society allied to a greater frankness toward its institutions. Inserted in the temporal sphere within a feudal order, the Temple is not bound by it, since it is not a human knighthood but that of the “sovereign King”: “Let no one, cleric or layman,” declares Innocent II, “dare to demand from the Master or the brothers faith, homage, oaths, or other securities in use in the world.” As such, it also enjoys immunity in wars, since its own has no earthly objective. That is why, declares Saint Bernard, “(the Templars) are almost the only ones among men to wage a legitimate war.” The restriction here very probably targets imperial right, for which “legitimate war” was one of the prerogatives; and we shall see better later the meaning of this comparison. It is in this perspective that one must assess its role as conciliator and peacemaker in internal conflicts (for example, during the English succession in 1153, in Henry II’s struggles with Thomas Becket or Louis VII, etc.) or external conflicts of Christendom (with Islam), as witness to treaties, guarantor of truces, depositary of dowries or pledges; or again its refusal to support causes it judged unjust, whether they concerned kings (Amaury of Jerusalem against the sultan of Egypt), emperors (Frederick II in Palestine), or even popes (Urban IV against Manfred); or finally the more or less official functions it fulfilled with popes and princes, serving some as diplomatic agent (Innocent III chiefly made use of it in his contacts with Muslim authorities), others as confidant, or even as censor, as when it said to Henry of England: “You will be king so long as you are just.”

This freedom with respect to regular institutions appears still more astonishingly in the ecclesiastical domain. Not only did the Templars pay no tithes—a privilege shared only with their brethren of Cîteaux—but they could collect them with the clergy’s consent. Not only could they receive clerics and duly ordained priests—“from wherever they come,” stipulates Innocent II—but “if it should happen that bishops refuse to grant them to you, you would nonetheless have the faculty to receive and retain them, by delegation of the holy Roman Church (63).” They could even in certain cases receive the excommunicated, whom bishops were in some sense obliged to absolve beforehand; the mere fact of profession covered the sin (64). Interdicts did not bind them, and Innocent III’s warning to his “sons of predilection,” regarding lack of discretion in celebrating Masses in interdicted towns, seems characteristic of their reciprocal relations: “...Otherwise, if some misfortune befalls you, you may impute it to yourselves and not to us (65).” This extraordinary situation, in the real sense of the word, was only the sanction of the Order’s spiritual suzerainty, and many great figures acknowledged it by their affiliation. Such seems to have been the case with Innocent III himself, according to one of his bulls. It certainly was the case with the emperor Henry VII of Luxembourg, on whom, after the destruction of the Order, the hopes of high Ghibellinism briefly settled. Philip the Fair, for his part, put himself forward as a candidate but was not accepted. Numerous, too, were those who made profession at

the moment of departing this world, so as to have a share in the other world in the “benefits” of the House.

One of the least known and yet most characteristic aspects of this general function of mediation and safeguarding is its activity in the economic and financial domains. How explain that a monastic order vowed to perpetual poverty and perpetual holy war should have been charged—as a normal mission, even if it appeared and disappeared with it—not only with guarding royal treasures, but with the role of a kind of international bank for payments, deposits, and credit, even if at the beginning it aimed to facilitate pilgrimages to the Holy Land? Why did powers both secular and religious judge it fitting to delegate to warrior-monks such an instrument of economic and political power, if not precisely because, by profession, they were not of this world, and, serving God, could not serve Mammon (66)? No doubt we must, in our day, make a certain effort to understand such an intention and admit such a possibility of sacralizing the temporal sphere even in its ultimate forms. It is the very effort required to understand any theocentric society from within ours, which can think itself only as a function of the expulsion of the sacred.

In another order of ideas, how explain this fact, attested by old charters: that the Order had the capacity to receive the homage of people from the lower classes—peasants, labourers, or artisans—who, wherever they had the freedom to do so, bound themselves to it by this solemn act, at once religious and civil, which made them its “men” (67)? But if one conceives Christendom as a real image and a “hope” of the *civitas Dei*, and the Temple in its most universal sense as the heart and centre of it, containing it in Spirit rather than being contained by it, then the guardians of the Temple become, normally, those of the total divine Order on earth, into which all domains of existence are called to be integrated. History itself testifies that this is indeed how the Middle Ages understood it; and it is its honour and greatness to have always seen, in Saint Augustine’s words, “the two cities, that of the earth and that of heaven, mingled and confused for a time in this world.”

These few traits allow one to suspect the place of the Order of the Temple in the real hierarchy of Christendom. René Guénon says on this point that the Order was, “by its double religious and warlike character, a kind of link between the spiritual and the temporal—if indeed this double character is not to be interpreted as the sign of a more direct relation with the common source of the two powers (68).” In truth, if the Temple’s mandate had not been imposed upon it, if it had not benefited in its own eyes from titles and a protection before which it could only bow, one may say without fear of contradiction that it would not have survived for long as such those who presided over its establishment in Europe, and that, at the very least, it would quickly have been confined to guarding the frontiers of Palestine (69). It is enough to consider the division of *de facto* temporal power, the conflicts of interest that set princes against one another or against the papacy, the incessant mutual encroachments of the two powers, to understand that an institution placed between them as a link, in order truly to be that, had to be more than that. Yet do we not see the Order not only subsist but grow and extend for nearly two centuries in general consensus, despite political barriers and the ever deepening divorce between Papacy and Empire—an Order whose mere existence was, for each of them, a permanent reminder of its limits? The truth is that

the source of the Temple's authority, being—as were its function and its very aim—esoteric, as such escaped their competence and their reach. If it had to submit to established powers in what fell under their proper jurisdiction, it imposed itself upon them by the sheer transcendence of its own mandate, under the double aspect of a sacred obligation and a source of grace. No doubt harmony and balance were difficult on both sides, and all the more so because the limits of jurisdiction were not always easy to recognize—or to admit. And if one takes into account human weakness, one can scarcely, when considering the spiritual apogee of what has been called the “great century” of medieval Christendom—corresponding in fact rather closely to the period of the Order of the Temple's existence—avoid admitting the supernatural character of this balance and of this pact deeper than all oppositions: of its force, its duration, and its fruits. We do not mean to say that the Order had the sole merit in it, if one may use that term in a domain that is strictly providential; it in fact shared it widely with élites of every allegiance, and above all with the other religious and chivalric orders and the initiatic artisanal confraternities to which it was closely linked (70). But to measure the role it played and the void its absence left, it suffices to note the abasement of the two powers that accompanied and followed its destruction, and the irremediable decadence the Christian world then underwent. If the events of 1307 to 1314 have such the look of an outrage, it is because they bear the very face of sacrilege. Clement V was not mistaken: he did not dare to condemn this Order, which the last Grand Master had, at the price of his life, attested “holy and pure,” but only to abolish it *per viam provisionis et ordinationis apostolicae*, without taking the risk of referring the matter to a Council. Iniquity here testifies—by its very depth—in favour of the “mystery of Justice” it could reach only by a crime, and because the West had ceased to be worthy of it (71).

There is still dispute over the guilt or innocence of the Order. It is likely that, because of the number of its adherents and the multiplicity of its secondary activities, and perhaps also—and above all—because of changes of fact or mentality that occurred within the century, it needed both reform and readaptation. But that is another question. We will content ourselves with citing H. de Curzon's observation: “The Rule, it is true, proves only one thing: that the Order of the Temple was governed to its last day by irreproachable laws, truly monastic and even very severe” (*op. cit.*, introduction, p. XIII), and the statement expressed in *La fin du Moyen-Age*, by Henri Pirenne, Augustin Renaudet, Édouard Perroy, and Marcel Handelsman (series *Histoire générale des Peuples et des Civilisations*, Presses Universitaires, Paris, 1931, p. 52, n. 1): “Gallican writers, to glorify Philip the Fair, and Church writers, to exculpate Clement V, long obscured the history of this period. The innocence of the Templars is today proved.”

VI

The Temple and Islam

The Temple's role in Europe, as will no doubt have been recognized, can be conceived only as an extension and a completion of its eastern role as guardian of the “Holy Land”; and this shows again that its military functions were, for it, only the outward aspect and the symbol of the true Holy War, whose end is Peace in every order, but first of all in the spiritual order. It is from this perspective that one must proceed if one wishes to judge accurately its attitude toward Islam—whose apparent ambiguity is nothing other than that of a link that had to hold fast even within

war. One must also remember that the two Christian and Muslim populations of Asia lived on the best of terms, as did those of Spain and Sicily, and maintained close relations whose traces are found in the creation of a common coinage, of the same standard as the dinar and bearing both Latin and Qur'anic mottoes; in alliances, marriages, commercial treaties, hunting permits exchanged reciprocally by the leaders of the two camps, and so forth (72).

That the Templars played an important role in this understanding can be seen from the following anecdote, drawn from the chronicle of the Eracles, in which the emir Usāma speaks, ambassador of the vizier of Damascus: "When I visited Jerusalem," says this author, "I entered the Al-Aqṣā mosque, which my friends the Templars occupied. Beside it there was a small mosque which the Franks had converted into a church. The Templars assigned me this small mosque so that I might perform my prayers there. One day I entered it; I glorified Allāh. I was absorbed in prayer when a Frank sprang at me, seized me, and turned my face toward the East, saying: 'This is how one prays!' A troop of Templars rushed upon him, seized him, and expelled him. Then they apologized to me and said: 'He is a foreigner who has only just arrived from the land of the Franks; he has never seen anyone pray without facing East' (73)."

"In the East," says E. Rey, "the grand masters were veritable independent princes, with their own officers, fortresses, and private armies (74)." They frequently spoke Arabic, and counted among their troops and at their table many Muslims (75). This independence placed them in a position not only to negotiate on their own initiative with the emirs, but also to serve habitually as arbiters in the treaties those emirs concluded with the Latins—Muslims demanding their guarantee "because they regarded them as pure men, incapable of failing in their word (76)." In more than one case we see grand masters bound by personal friendship with sultans, such as Guillaume de Sonnac with the sultan of Cairo in the time of Saint Louis: "For such conduct and for several other reasons the Christians of Syria suspected that the master of the Temple might be their adversary. But the Templars said that he showed such affection and paid him such honour in order to keep the land of the Christians in peace, and so that it would not be made war upon by the Sultan or the Saracens (77)."

That this involved something other than peace in the ordinary sense becomes apparent through the accusation brought against them of having concluded secret pacts (*pactiones secretas*) with the Muslims—specifically of having obtained, in exchange for the introduction of "errors" into their Rule, material support and Muslim "recommendation." An apparently absurd charge, but one that merely distorts a real fact: namely, that there were doctrinal foundations for this deliberately pacific attitude. The most eloquent proof is the resolution taken by many Spanish Templars at the beginning of the persecutions—recorded in the trial as one of the signs of "connivance"—to "go over entirely to the Saracens" (*se transtulerunt omnino*), even though it was possible for them to enter other orders (78).

It goes without saying that the Temple's relations with Islam were above all of an initiatic order. "In the lands of the East," says Armand Bédarride on this point, "(the Templars) made knights of Greek Catholics hostile to the papacy, and even—more extraordinary still—of Muslims belonging to certain esoteric sects provided with an initiation analogous to their own (79) ..." Such was the case with Saladin himself, to whom, according to the *Ordène de Chevalerie*, a

poem from the beginning of the thirteenth century, the Order was given by Hugues de Tabarie in 1187. Such too was the case with his brother Malik al-‘Ādil, whom Richard the Lionheart made a knight in 1192. Malik al-‘Ādil was the very one who, in the midst of battle, sent two horses to Richard when he was dismounted—“because it is not fitting that a king should fight on foot”—and to whom Richard, without Rome’s opposition, would have given his sister in marriage, with the plan of establishing a Christian–Muslim condominium over Jerusalem.

Among the Muslim orders with which the Temple contracted these bonds of spiritual brotherhood, history has especially preserved the memory of that of the Assassins. This was an Ismā‘īlī branch of the Shi‘ism of the Indies, very closed and strongly hierarchical, which in the East was called the Bāṭiniyya (the “interior ones,” or esoterics). Founded some fifty years before the Temple, it established itself in Persia in 1090 and rapidly extended as far as Iraq and Syria. The astonishing resemblances between the two orders have often been noted: both were at once initiatic and military; both bore the title “guardians of the Holy Land” (the word “assassin,” which has been derived from *hashshāshīn*, is far more probably a transcription of the plural of the Arabic *assās*, “guardian”; in the thirteenth century it appears in the form *assasi*); and the jihād of the Assassins had the same meaning as the holy war of the Temple, even if the methods differed. They played, vis-à-vis constituted powers, the same role of oversight and counsel. Their hierarchy—double in both cases (external and secret)—displayed common features, and their emblematic colours, white and red, were the same. From the Temple’s very foundation in 1118, when it still numbered only nine members, one finds its alliance with the Assassins—an alliance that would not be disavowed until the disappearance of the latter at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The Templars, in exchange for a symbolic tribute, had authorized their Muslim brethren to fortify themselves in Lebanon—something fairly significant if one remembers the medieval principle of the *justitia terrae* concerning the immunity of any Christian land, corresponding moreover to an identical principle governing Muslim land (80).

The history and doctrine of that Order, disfigured by what Henry Corbin calls the “romances of anti-Ismā‘īlī historians,” are much better known thanks to recent studies. We will limit ourselves here to noting that the Ismā‘īlī eschatology of the invisible Imām, the permanent hypostasis of the Logos, is substantially identical to that of the universal Empire in the medieval esotericism of Templar tradition; and the same holds for the notion of the spiritual Temple, as is shown by this passage from the *Dīwān* of Nāṣir-i Khusraw cited by Henry Corbin: “The apparent (exoteric, *zāhir*) meaning of prayer is to worship God with bodily postures, orienting one’s body toward the *qibla* of bodies, which is the Ka‘ba, the Temple of the Most High God situated at Mecca. The spiritual exegesis of the esoteric meaning (*ta’wīl-e bāṭin*) of Prayer is to worship God with one’s thinking soul, orienting oneself, in the search for the gnosis of the Book and of the positive Religion, toward the *qibla* of spirits, which is the Temple of God—the Temple in which divine Gnosis is enclosed; I mean the Imām in Truth—upon him be peace (81).” We noted earlier, moreover, the assimilation—within the same text—of the Quest for the Imām to the Quest for the Stone of the celestial Ka‘ba, one of the grounds on which Henry Corbin concluded: “I believe one can say that the ‘quest for the Imām’ represented for an Ismā‘īlī what the ‘quest for the Grail’ represented for our mystical knights and our minstrels (82).”

The Order of the Assassins, despite its special characteristics, was not an isolated fact in Islam at that time, and chivalric institutions existed among the Muslims of the East and of Spain long before the appearance of chivalry in Europe. We will refer first, on this point, to Hammer-Purgstall's study entitled *On the Chivalry of the Arabs Prior to that of Europe, and on the Influence of the Former on the Latter* (83). Hammer begins by examining the exact meaning of the Arabic word *ghaloub*, which passed into Provençal under the form *galaubia*: "a kind of exaltation that drives a man to seek glory in combat; martial bravery." In Arabic, according to Hammer, *ghālib* should be translated not as "victor," but as "the one who prevails." It is one of the designations of 'Alī, just as the word *fatā*, knight, hero, is, according to the ḥadīth: "There is no sword but Dhū l-Faḳār (the epithet of 'Alī's sword) and no *fatā* but 'Alī." The noun *futūwwat* translates as chivalry, liberality, generosity; but the basic sense, which seems to have escaped Hammer, is that of "self-abnegation." The *futūwwat* is a chivalric institution, and the *fatā* is the grade of knight, "conferred not by princes but by the shaykhs" (spiritual masters, heads of initiatic organizations). Hammer adds: "The caliph of Baghdad al-Nāṣir li-dīn Allāh, whose forty-five-year reign spans the period from 1180 to 1225 of the Christian era, was one of the most romantic and most chivalrous princes mentioned by Oriental history. The history of Abū l-Fidā' and the chronological tablets of Ḥājj Khalīfa twice mention the act of *futūwwat*, conferred the first time in the year 578 (1182): 'The caliph al-Nāṣir was clothed with the garment of Chivalry by Shaykh 'Abd al-Jabbār.' This ceremony was accompanied by a toast drunk from the Cup of Chivalry (*ka'su l-futūwwat*). This passage, extremely important for the history of Chivalry, at the same time gives the most natural explanation of the Grail, that marvellous vessel entrusted to the Templars' guardianship, to which they did not fail to attach a gnostic sense, as the Arabic inscriptions on these vessels prove ..." Hammer continues: "The time that elapsed between the Prophet's word, which declared ... his son-in-law 'Alī the knight par excellence at the battle of Uḥud (624), and the chivalric embassies of the caliph al-Nāṣir li-dīn Allāh (1210) spans six centuries, so that Arab chivalry is four centuries older than European chivalry ... It is worth noting that the caliph al-Nāṣir ... was contemporary with Saladin, to whom he had sent a prince's diploma one year before he himself received the grade of knight from Shaykh 'Abd al-Jabbār. Now the time of Saladin, of Richard the Lionheart, of Duke Leopold of Austria, and of King Philip Augustus—that is, the end of the twelfth century—is the finest era of Christian chivalry. This era, dating from the foundation of the Templars after the capture of Jerusalem, was at its height a hundred years later at the capture of Acre by the Crusaders, and ended with the loss of that place and the evacuation of all Syria in 690 (1291)." Hammer finally adds: "Since 'Alī is the flower and prototype of Arab knights, and since Ghālib—that is, 'the one who prevails'—is one of his names, the connection between chivalric ideas and sentiments, attached by the Provençals to the various forms of *galoubié* and the name of Islam's first knight, is obvious."

Let us also cite, regarding Muslim chivalry in Spain—whose existence is attested a century before the Temple's foundation—the following note by Antonio Conde in his *History of the Domination of the Arabs in Spain*, reported by Fauriel: "These Muslim *rābiṭas* or border-guards lived a very austere life, willingly devoted themselves to the perpetual exercise of arms, and bound themselves by vow to defend their frontiers against attacks by Christian warriors. They were all élite knights. They were not permitted to flee; they had to fight intrepidly, and die rather

than abandon their post. It is very likely that, following the example of these *rābiṭas*, those military orders so famous for their bravery and the services they rendered to Christianity were formed, both in Spain and among the Christians of the East. There is a great resemblance between the two institutions (84).”

What should one conclude from all this? One can first set aside the idea of an imitation of externals, as incompatible with the very notion of initiation. Nor can one retain that of a direct filiation, for several reasons, the first being the proven existence of a Christian esotericism. The truth, in our view, lies in that conjunction of the two esotericisms—in the spiritual and technical sense of the word—that we tried to define earlier. Only this explains the extraordinary permeability of the Christian world to Islamic influences, and the paradoxical resemblance of chivalric institutions on both sides. One must not lose sight of the fact that the modes of expression of a living spirituality are not imported or improvised. They presuppose pre-existing possibilities, without which they would have only an artificial existence and soon become obsolete. The role of a fraternal tradition can only be to provoke their actualization or regeneration. It is normal and necessary that, to do so, it lend the aid of its own formulas; and this is what explains how institutions indubitably Christian in every respect can nonetheless assert themselves with features that appear borrowed. Islam very consciously played this role, and one may think that it extended far beyond its visible signs. This is, in particular, the Temple’s true *pactio secreta*, thanks to which “in that religion the order of Chivalry has flourished and been resurrected.”

None of this implies that one must follow Hammer when he derives the Grail from the Cup of Chivalry. Their real relation is not that of derivation but of analogy: the cup is connected here with the symbolism of initiatic beverages (85), whereas the datum of the Grail—complex in itself and in its origins, which very likely go back to the primordial Tradition—concerns directly the symbolism of spiritual Centres; and that is why its true Islamic correspondent is the Black Stone of the Ka‘ba.

There remain other traces of a direct influence of Islamic esotericism upon the Templars. Let us mention, for the record, the Arabic inscriptions appearing on certain objects of ritual use, whose authenticity is doubtful. A more enigmatic indication is the mention of an invocation of the Name Allāh in the depositions given at the Carcassonne inquiry—concerning the alleged idol that became famous under the name Baphomet—a mention that is also reported in a testimony at the Florence inquiry. A dignitary, the preceptor of Aquitaine, alludes on this occasion to “a friend of God, who spoke to God whenever he wished, and who was the protector of the Order (86).” Who could this Protector have been, to whom so high a spiritual degree was ascribed? The very title implies a function superior to that of the highest authority of the Order, and overflowing its framework. One cannot help thinking here of what F. Ossendowski reports, on the authority of Tibetan lamas, concerning the King of the World—“who can speak to God as I speak to you (87).” Since we are dealing with documents from interrogations, and thus a priori highly subject to doubt, we shall refrain from drawing any conclusion from this juxtaposition between an invocation of the Name Allāh and this mysterious Protector of the Order, even

though details of this sort are more likely to be distorted than wholly invented. In any case, it is plausible that here we are touching closely upon the famous Secret of the Templars.

“After the destruction of the Order of the Temple,” says René Guénon, “those initiated into Christian esotericism reorganized themselves, in agreement with those initiated into Islamic esotericism, in order to maintain, as far as possible, the link that had apparently been broken by that destruction.” This link was broken again in the seventeenth century, the time when the last Rosicrucians withdrew to the East. Guénon remarks on this point in the same passage: “It would be entirely useless to try to determine ‘geographically’ the place of retreat of the Rosicrucians; of all the assertions one encounters on this subject, the truest is certainly that according to which they withdrew to the ‘kingdom of Prester John,’ since this is nothing other than a representation of the supreme spiritual Centre, where indeed are preserved in a latent state, until the end of the current cycle, all the traditional forms which, for one reason or another, have ceased to manifest outwardly (88).”

It is this notion of the supreme Centre that gives all these facts their true import, just as it governs the whole symbolism of the *Parzival*. This is the true Holy Land of medieval esotericism, whether Christian, Jewish, or Islamic. The latter, for its part, refers to it fairly often, though of course always in a more or less veiled way. We saw this above in connection with the “celestial Earth.” The teaching of the Brethren of Purity (*Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ*) offers another example under the symbol of the “spiritual City.” This order, of Shiʿite lineage like the Assassins, openly professed, as they did, traditional universality; and—note this in passing—while giving a large place to cosmological sciences, in particular to Alchemy (from *al-kīmiyāʾ*, the black earth, the mediating substance of transmutations, also called *ʿilm al-ḥajar*, Science of the Stone, the latter being the Means of the Work, *al-iksīr*, *iksīr al-falāsīfa*, from which the West made “elixir”). One also finds mention of the supreme Centre among great masters of Sufism such as Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī and ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī. The first alludes to it in several poems, and especially in the Preface to his *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, translated and presented for the first time in French by M. Michel Vâlsan in his study entitled *The Investiture of the Shaykh al-Akbar at the Supreme Centre*. Since the passages that concern us can scarcely be separated from their context, we shall ask the reader to refer to them and will cite only the following lines from M. Vâlsan’s introduction: “... The Shaykh al-Akbar sets forth, in the relatively incantatory form characteristic of the liminal texts of Islamic writings, his access to the Supreme Centre of the Primordial and Universal Tradition, which he designates here several times by the term *al-Malaʾu l-Aʿlā*, the ‘Supreme Plērōma’ or the ‘Sublime Assembly.’ This Assembly, situated in a subtle region whose designations will recall what the traditions of Central Asia say of Agarthā, the hidden Kingdom of the King of the World, is presided over by the primordial Muhammadan Being, whose nature and attributes—taking into account the particularities of Islamic formulation—correspond fairly clearly to those that René Guénon indicated for the personification of the primordial Manu, and that Christian doctrine ... presents under the figure of the mysterious Melchizedek ‘who is without father, without mother, without genealogy, who has neither beginning nor end of life, but is made thus like unto the Son of God’ and who ‘remains a priest for ever’ (Hebrews 7:1–3) (89).”

There is all the less reason to be astonished at a conscious common participation of Christianity and Islam in the permanent prophetic Mystery designated by Scripture under the figure of Melchizedek, since it is precisely he who invests and blesses Abraham in the name of God Most High—and in him the three monotheistic traditions of which Abraham is the root. Scripture says that he remains for ever, and his Order with him. And it is because they are members of this Order, and co-participants in what Isaiah calls the “substance of mysteries,” that one has been able to see Islam and Christianity—one giving and the other receiving—that secret assistance which allowed the Grail, that is, that very substance hidden at the heart of every authentic and intact tradition, to flower for a moment openly in the West. That the Order of the Grail was nothing other than an expression of the very Order of Melchizedek, or King of the World, is sufficiently attested by the single mention of Prester John in the *Parzival*; and it is known that, according to the *Titirel*, it is with Prester John that the Grail will find a refuge which is in fact nothing other than a repatriation (90).

One may perhaps wonder whether, beyond the convergent indications we have noted in this study—which in any case does not claim to be complete—there exists a positive certainty of a conscious will to assist on the part of Islamic esotericism toward Christian esotericism. Such certainty does indeed exist, for—as M. Michel Vâlsan again indicates in his study *The Last High Degrees of Scottish Rite Masonry and the Descending Realization*—“in Islamic esotericism, and according to its own ‘perspective,’ it is said that the *Qutb* (Pole, or supreme head of the initiatic hierarchy and spiritual heir of the Prophet, whose function is represented permanently in Islam) grants his providential aid not only to Muslims, but also to Christians and Jews...” (91). To show, moreover, how in the doctrine of Islamic esotericism the notion of the Pole is articulated with that of the supreme Centre, we shall cite this other passage from the same study, where the author again refers to Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*: “According to the Shaykh al-Akbar (*Futūḥāt*, ch. 73), the Islamic Pole and his Imāms are only representatives of certain living prophets who constitute the fundamental and perpetual hierarchy of tradition in our world. This correspondence is indicated according to a special configuration of the higher Islamic hierarchy, in which the Pole and the two Imāms are counted within the quaternary of the *Awtād*, the Pillars—functions upon which Islam rests and whose symbolic positions are at the four cardinal points. These *Awtād* are the ‘vicars’ (*nuwwāb*, sing. *nā’ib*) of the four prophets whom the general Islamic tradition recognizes as not having been touched by bodily death: Idrīs (Enoch), Ilyās (Elijah), ‘Īsā (Jesus), and Khiḍr. The first three are properly *rusul*, that is, ‘legislators,’ but they no longer have the role of formulating any new law, since the legislative cycle is closed with the Muhammadan revelation. The fourth, Khiḍr—about whom there is commonly divergence as to whether he is a ‘prophet’ (*nabī*) or a saint (*walī*)—corresponds, according to the Shaykh al-Akbar, to a function of general Prophethood which, by its normal definition in any case, does not carry a legislative attribute. These beings—or rather these functions—are the Pillars (*al-Awtād*) of the Pure Tradition (*al-dīn al-ḥanīf*), which is obviously the primordial and universal Tradition with which Islam identifies itself in its essence. It must be added that if these primordial functions are thus designated by prophets who appeared only in the course of the present human cycle, this is, in the Shaykh al-Akbar, merely a way of supporting—by facts recognized by Islamic tradition in general—the affirmation of the existence of a supreme Centre outside the particular form of Islam and above the Islamic spiritual centre” (92).

These indications are suited, we believe, to complete the placement of Islam's providential role in relation to Christianity in its true perspective. If further proofs of this role were needed, we would recall the journeys in Islamic lands (Syria, Arabia, Morocco) attributed to Christian Rosenkreutz, the legendary founder of the Rosicrucians—the spiritual heirs of Templarism—journeys in which René Guénon, in a passage already cited, saw precisely the confirmation of an agreement between the two esotericisms, Christian and Islamic, with a view to re-establishing the initiatic organizations of the West after the destruction of the Order of the Temple, and to “maintain, as far as possible, the link apparently broken by that destruction.” Guénon added: “This collaboration must have continued afterwards... We shall go further still: the same persons, whether they came from Christianity or from Islam, may—if they lived in both East and West (and the constant allusions to their travels, symbolism aside, suggest that this must have been the case for many of them)—have been at once Rosicrucians and Sufis (or *mutaṣawwifūn* of the higher degrees), the spiritual state they had attained implying that they were beyond the differences that exist between exterior forms and that in no way affect the essential and fundamental unity of traditional doctrine” (93).

Although René Guénon, in writing these lines, was no doubt not thinking of Gahmuret and Feirefiz, does it not seem that we have here an explanation—in its most precise aspect—of their spiritual ambiguity, and a plain-language rendering of one of the principal themes of the *Parzival*? One has been able to see that this theme, which relates to the deep constitution of the universal traditional Order, does not belong to fiction, but to spiritual realities expressed in a doctrine inspired directly by a sacred teaching and transmitted by masters whose knowledge of these matters can no more be doubted than their holiness. One has also been able to see that the assistance which such particular traditional forms may lend one another at any given moment implies no essential superiority of one over another; that it is in no way the work of individuals or isolated groups without mandate; and that it proceeds from no properly human design of religious or political competition. What is at issue here is the permanent mystery of the divine Presence (Shekinah), its indwelling in humanity and in the world—without which the world would vanish—and the modes of its providential actuality at such-and-such a moment in history, according as human beings and nations draw near to it or draw away from it; and also according as certain cyclical deficiencies, not necessarily accidental, may lead certain elements of the total Order, better preserved and more efficacious, to lend their aid to others, in order to maintain it on new bases and with new formulas. The Grail was and remains the real symbol of this Presence. No more than it is, is it a fiction.

VII

A glance at the other Grail romances

The theological and intellectual problem posed by the coexistence and the respective value of the three Faiths—Jewish, Christian, and Islamic—was one of the principal objects of meditation in the medieval world. Certain tales, such as the well-known apologue of the Three Rings, which enjoyed wide circulation, show the terms in which it was posed as a matter of identity and suggest that the élites, at least, were well aware that it had no solution except on the esoteric

plane (94). But to find other examples of a calculated boldness like that of the *Parzival*, with its transparent symbolism, one must wait for Dante and the *Fedeli d'Amore*, who were in any case only the successors of the same school; and even the boldness of the latter concerned rather the “imperial mystery,” the question of traditional unity, necessarily linked to it, having had to be concealed under the pressure of circumstances created by the abolition of the Order of the Temple. One may nonetheless ask whether the other Grail romances, failing positions as explicit as Wolfram’s, do not show traces of analogous influences or tendencies.

We have seen that Chrétien de Troyes’s *Perceval*, although certainly proceeding from the same source as the *Parzival*—both by its own analysis and by Wolfram’s assertions—offers, at least apparently, no indication of this kind; and we judged that we could conclude that this was doubtless one of Wolfram’s principal grievances against it. We did, however, note in Chrétien the trace of a doctrine of invoking the divine Names, which, insofar as it existed within Christian esotericism, can only be of Judaic or Islamic origin. This fact would merely confirm, if confirmation were needed, Wolfram’s truthfulness regarding the existence of a Provençal Grail tradition, of Oriental origin and Islamic filiation, of which Chrétien would have been publicly the first interpreter, if not the most faithful. The ties of the counts of Flanders with the Crusades can plead in the same direction. As for Robert de Boron’s *Estoire dou Graal*, it seems to refer to a purely Christian tradition, for which some have sought stepping-stones in texts such as the *Gospel of Nicodemus* and the *Gemma animae* of Honorius of Augsburg. But the first offers only part of the legend of Joseph of Arimathea, and the second only a similarity in the interpretation of the symbolism of the Mass; in neither does one find an allusion to the legend properly speaking of the Holy Vessel. Why does the latter manifest only at the end of the twelfth century, when the relics of Joseph had been venerated for several centuries at Moyaenmoutier, then at Glastonbury? One can say, certainly, that there was, for the “great clerics” who deposited the “great secrets” of the Holy Grail in the “great book” on which Robert claims to depend, a moment of spiritual opportunity which—like the work of Chrétien and what followed it—commanded this manifestation. But there is reason to think that, if this moment did not appear earlier, it is because it was due to a precise concurrence of favourable circumstances, at the head of which one must place, on the one hand, the Celtic revival of the eleventh century that has been called Neo-Druidism, and on the other hand and above all the contacts made with the East on the occasion of the Crusades. Note in this regard that Gautier de Montbéliard, Robert’s patron, took the cross in 1199, and that, according to Hélie de Boron, his kinsman and author of an epilogue to the *Tristan* of Luce de Gast, the Boron family was allied to that of the Barres, which counted among its members men who had commanded in the East and even a Grand Master of the Temple.

Among the later works, we have seen that only Albrecht’s *New Titurel*, written around 1270, in which the epic fragment of Wolfram’s own *Titurel* is in fact inserted, offers evident relations with the *Parzival*, of which it presents itself as a complement and continuation. Albrecht takes up the story of Parzival’s forebears, notably Titurel and Gahmuret. He sets out how, after fixing the Grail’s residence on the north-eastern confines of Spain, God finally transports it—because of the increase of sin on the earth—to India, not far from the Earthly Paradise, where it is entrusted to the keeping of Prester John himself. The Grail Temple in Spain, built to plans given by God

himself and “arranged like the majestic palace which Prester John had raised in India by command of Heaven,” was a marvellous construction, built on the same circular, ternary, and radiating type as the sanctuaries of the Order of the Temple, consecrated like it to the Holy Spirit, and guarded by “Templists” (95). It is therefore indeed a work of the same school, with developments that the *Parzival* had only begun.

The *New Titurel* presents, in contrast to all the other texts of the second and third periods, a contrast as striking as that of the *Parzival* with those of Chrétien and Robert, from which they derive. One nonetheless notes, in the prose works attached to the so-called Map cycle, certain indices of interest for our purpose: one of them is the white shield with vermilion cross given by Joseph of Arimathea to Evalach, king of Sarras, baptised under the name Mordrain and ancestor of Galahad. This shield, which would await for four hundred years the elect who must arm himself with it in order to complete the Quest, had procured for Evalach in peril the help of God under the appearance of a white knight bearing, likewise, a white shield with vermilion cross; he was the artisan of his victory, then of his baptism, and finally of the consecration of Sarras as City of the Grail. If one recalls that the vermilion cross was imposed in 1146 by Pope Eugenius III, disciple of Saint Bernard, upon the white mantle of the Templars as an exclusive privilege of the Order, one may see in this a fairly clear allusion to the latter—remembering that medieval symbolism did not take time into account—which would accord with the Cistercian influences recognized in the *Queste du Graal*, and with the close ties that notoriously united the two orders of Cîteaux and the Temple. Another index is the city of Sarras itself, about which the author takes care to say that it is from it that the Saracens are descended, and not from Sarah, Abraham’s wife. In this Egyptian city stood the “Spiritual Palace,” from very ancient times, since the prophet Daniel, on the road to captivity, had read its name written in Hebrew upon its door. It was there that Joseph of Arimathea, on leaving Palestine, came to found his community and establish the Grail’s seat, and it was there that the descendant of Evalach—Mordrain, Galahad, carried by Solomon’s ship, was later to arrive, in order to be admitted to see the Grail “openly” and complete the Quest. There is here a fairly clear allusion to a spiritual centre anterior to Christianity, with the indication, in veiled terms, of a junction—on the soil of Egypt—of the Judaic, Christian, and Islamic esotericisms. This junction is confirmed for the first two by the fact that, in another passage, Galahad, the seal of chivalry, is given as the end of Solomon’s lineage, for whose sake the king-prophet had had the sacred ship built in advance, “signifying the new house” of God. One cannot help observing that it is precisely from Egypt that the Hermetic tradition originates, the tradition that in the early Middle Ages was to be incorporated into Judaism, Christianity, and Islam alike. Hermeticism is traditionally connected with Heliopolis, the City of the Sun. Now the fairest temple of Sarras was the Temple of the Sun, and the Saracens “held it in great honour (96).”

When we spoke of a contrast between the *Parzival* and the *Titurel* on the one hand and the other branches of the Grail on the other, it goes without saying that we did not mean to minimize the proper value of those materials. The contrast does not bear upon the traditional elements themselves, but upon their use within the body of the work and the light in which they are placed. Here, in effect, one finds none of the capital notions that so strongly characterize Wolfram’s work and Albrecht’s: the notion of the Grail’s universality, that of the link with Islam

and Prester John, that of the Order and Empire of the Grail. The assignment to Sarraas of the Saracens' true origin is not otherwise exploited except in a hostile sense; and it matters little here whether that hostility is feigned or real. The Grail, moreover, becomes there so specifically Christian, despite the reference to Solomon, that its history is given as one of only three things Christ ever wrote with his own hand (the other two being the Lord's Prayer and the words written on the ground concerning the adulterous woman), and the only thing he wrote after his resurrection. Moreover, the Church's influence in the secondary works is sufficiently noticeable that one commentator could say that the *Queste du Graal* "brings everything back within the Roman order" (97). Without subscribing to that assertion, insofar as "Roman order" is meant to denote only exoteric discipline, one must nonetheless acknowledge a clear tendency, particularly apparent in the respective versions of the Grail's final occultation: in Wolfram, though "hidden from all eyes," it remains on the soil of the West; in Albrecht it withdraws to the vicinity of the Earthly Paradise, but remains present here below; whereas in the *Queste*, by contrast, it is taken up into heaven. This summary glimpse, which we have had to limit to the principal features, allows one to see that, if the mystery of the Grail is one in its spiritual ground, it gave rise to a fairly diverse teaching as regards the doctrinal developments of its symbolic "matter." This is a fact in the interpretation of which one cannot show too much prudence. Yet there is one point that raises no doubt, being a simple matter of observation: the branches issuing from Chrétien and Robert united around the theme of the Christic Vessel to constitute the powerful current from which were to be born—after the parallel works of an anonymous author and of Geucher de Denain, the latter followed by the continuations of Manessier and Gerbert de Montreuil—the great Lancelot cycle (*Lancelot proper*, *Queste du Graal*, *Morte Artu*) which Dante called the *ambages regis Arturi pulcherrimae*, and finally the *Perlesvaus*; while the branch issuing from Wolfram, though less fertile, asserted its rivalry through Albrecht's *Titirel*. One recognizes here two distinct currents: one strictly Western, the expression of a school—or rather a group of schools—doubtless in relation to the Orders of Saint Benedict (through Glastonbury in particular) and of Cîteaux; the other of Eastern filiation, expressing the doctrine of the Order of the Temple. But before trying to penetrate the meaning of this duality, we must examine what Arthurian symbolism and the notion of Empire represented in the mind of the Middle Ages.

(94) See this tale, in its different versions, in Gaston Paris, *La poésie au Moyen-Age*, Hachette, Paris, 1906, vol. II. In the version that seems the oldest, the question of the respective value of the religions is posed by King Peter of Aragon (1095–1104) to a Jew, who escapes the difficulty by telling the story of a father bequeathing to his two sons two stones equally precious, and who concludes: "Send, O King, a messenger to the Father who is in the Heavens; He is the great Jeweller, and He will know how to indicate the difference between the stones." In the *Novellino* (end of the thirteenth century), a Jew likewise is tested on the same subject by Saladin, and answers him with the parable of the Three Rings: "Each (of the sons) believed he had the true one, and no one knew the truth of it except their father. Thus it is with the Faiths, my lord; the Faiths are three: the Father, who gave them, knows the best, and of the sons—that is, us—each believes he has the true one." In Boccaccio's *Decameron*, the same story; but here the Jew is called Melchizedek... Boccaccio, as is known, was a *Fidèle d'Amour*.

(95) Cf. Oswald van den Berghe, “Le Temple du Graal,” in *Annales Archéologiques*, vol. XVII, July 1857, pp. 216–226.

(96) Hucher, op. cit., vol. III, p. 130.

(97) René Nelli, “Le Graal dans l’ethnographie,” in *Lumière du Graal*, op. cit., p. 34.

VIII

The Celtic encounter

One of the incomparable proofs of the high intellectuality of the Grail romances is the perfect conjunction of the two themes on which they rest. Onto the primitive theme of Arthur and the Round Table, that of the Grail—until then unknown or kept silent—came, in fact, to impose itself, not so much as a continuation as as a new revelation. “The first introducers of the bardic traditions and the Arthurian cycle into France,” says the historian Henri Martin—Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace, the author, whoever he may be, of the *Life of Merlin* in Latin verse, the author or authors of the fragments of the *Tristan* in French verse, and even Chrétien de Troyes in *The Knight of the Lion* and *The Knight of the Cart*—“had not said a word of the legend (of the Grail). It seems to have arrived among the clerics and trouvères of Henry II’s court some years after Wace wrote the *Brut*... Scarcely is the legend in the hands of the learned men of the Anglo-Norman court—among whom, remarkably, figure several knights—than they develop it into vast amplifications and bring about between it and the cycle of the Round Table a combination that had never occurred among the Welsh (98).” We do not know whether this “combination” was in fact made at Henry II’s court, or whether, rather, the initiatic organisations responsible for it did not find there a favourable place for bringing it to light. The important point is that, as Henri Martin says elsewhere, the Grail branch was “grafted” at a certain moment onto the venerable tree grown in Celtic soil; and if the weld between the two themes is as invisible as that of Perceval’s sword, to the point that the second appears as the fulfilment, the “crowning” of the first, it is because it answers an inward necessity of symbolic logic, and not because the Grail originally figured within the apparent end of Arthur’s empire and the institution of the Round Table. When, around 1180, the Grail appeared for the first time with Chrétien de Troyes’s work, the great Arthurian legend had already been widespread throughout the whole Western world for many years; during those years, apparently sufficient unto itself, it had contributed—thanks to troubadours and trouvères—mightily to the rise of chivalry. In this it had done more than relay, within their function, the *Chansons de geste* of the Charlemagne cycle or the classical romances (*Romance of Alexander*, *Romance of Thebes*, *Aeneas*, *Troy*, etc.): it had transposed their object onto a more strictly legendary plane—that is to say, more intellectually legible and more directly initiatic. This is, we think, the real motive for the triumphant advent of the “Matter of Britain,” and it calls for a few observations.

Contrary to what is generally believed, the Celtic tradition did not disappear at the evangelisation of Gaul and insular Britain. Traces of its activity are found not only in the Celtic-Christian revival of the eleventh century that has been called Neo-Druidism, but up to the fourteenth and even the fifteenth century. Merlin’s oracles, in particular, were heard throughout the Middle

Ages, and listened to not only by the people but by princes and even clerics (such as Orderic Vitalis, Suger, Alain de Lille), without opposition from the Church, which did not prohibit them until after the Council of Trent, when they survived only as mere superstitions (99). The Celtic countries are the only ones in which Christianity was received spontaneously and almost without bloodshed; and it owed to this doctrinal synthesis—where it is not exaggerated to see a kind of intellectual miracle—with a wisdom- or knowledge-form tradition analogous in many respects to Hinduism, the preservation of its primitive esoteric impregnation far more than Roman-jurisdiction Christianity, from which it was independent. It is this synthesis that explains in particular why Armorica was evangelised not by missionaries from Rome but by Celtic Christianity, as belonging to the traditional—that is, spiritual—domain of sacred Britain.

For several centuries the two traditions subsisted side by side: Christianity gradually taking charge of the general community of the Breton peoples, while Druidism proper withdrew into an order of ever more hidden activity, chiefly eremitic in form. “Alongside the public teaching of the (Christian) clergy,” says Henri Martin again, “the bards have a secret teaching, irreconcilable—not with Christian metaphysics, but with the Roman Christianity of the Middle Ages, and with a great part of the doctrines accredited by the Church, especially since Saint Augustine. They preserved something of the symbols and initiation rites of Druidism... There (in the Celtic doctrinal sanctuary) rest those arcana which, transmitted for centuries by oral tradition, will—thanks to a happy transgression of the ancient maxims—be delivered to writing at the moment when the bardic rites are about to disappear... It is there (in the Book of Arcana, *Cyfrinach*’h) that Celtic thought, before stripping off its particular and perishable forms, deposited what it contained of the immortal: its great system of the destinies of the soul and of divine and human personality, rekindled by a flame of divine love lit from Christ’s torch (100).”

The Druids, in their great majority, had rallied to the new religion, forming in particular those mysterious Culdee monks about whom history is almost silent, but of whom it is at least certain that they helped to secure for Christianity the sacred inheritance of expiring Celtism. That this inheritance participated in the Grail’s “infancy” is shown not only by the presence of purely Celtic elements in the legend’s structure, but also by the prior existence among the Britons of an original tradition of the salutary cup containing the “water of resurrection.” This cup had figured for tens of centuries in the stone zodiac of the stellar temple of Glastonbury, and it reappears in bardic poems. Taliesin, in particular, the great sixth-century bard, said that it “inspires poetic genius, gives wisdom, discloses to its worshippers the knowledge of the future, the mysteries of the world (101).” “Its rim,” says Taliesin again, “is adorned with rows of pearls and diamonds,” which—at the cost of changing its prophetic virtues into eucharistic virtues—allows one to see in it the prototype of the vessel described by Chrétien de Troyes, which, as is known, received only in Chrétien’s continuators its exclusively Christic specification.

How are these facts to be reconciled with the properly Christian datum and the Eastern datum? One must first specify that, as Henri Hubert says, “the Celts are not a race but a group of peoples, more exactly a group of societies,” whose foundation and bond was the druidic priesthood, a “pan-Celtic institution, the cement of Celtic society (102).” Rather than a caste properly speaking, the Druids formed a strongly hierarchical order, distributed into three classes: the

Druids properly so called (whose name seems to derive from the two roots *dhru*, “force,” and *vid*, “vision,” “knowledge”), the *Files* or *Filid*, and the Bards; this order, Henri Hubert adds, “constitutes a confraternity (*sodaliciis adstricti consortiis*)... in which there must have been an initiation, a preparation, degrees of which we find traces among the *Filid*,” and which “overrides tribes and states.”

The Druids having always refused to fix their teaching in writing, the little we know of it rests on the famous bardic Triads and the rare data transmitted by ancient authors. One can nonetheless discern rigorous metaphysical bases in it, and a form of prophetic and “mystical” wisdom that has sometimes led people to compare it with Jewish prophetism, but which is allied above all to Hinduism. One does, in fact, discern a doctrine of transmigration, a doctrine of ascending and descending realisation, a doctrine of cosmic cycles, as well as an anthropology and a cosmology which, in more than one feature, recall those of Vedānta.

A first point is therefore established: Celtism is not an ethnic or sociological fact, but a tradition, in the precise sense in which we have taken this word following René Guénon. The earliest manifestations of this tradition go back well before the arrival of the Brittonic peoples (Goidels and Britons or Cymry) on Europe’s Atlantic coasts in the sixth century before our era. The dialectal differences of these peoples show, by themselves, that their separation was already very ancient, and that, to recover Celtic unity, “one must go back as far as what many still call the Neolithic period—that is to say, the very long succession of centuries during which the use of metals was slowly introduced into Western and Northern Europe (103).”

The question of Celtism’s origins is, moreover, only one aspect of the great Indo-European problem, through which one of the most intense centres of light ever to illuminate human history makes itself felt across the millennia. We must here recall its terms briefly: since the middle of the last century it has been perceived that there exists, between all the old civilisation-languages of Europe and of Western and Central Asia, a kinship such that it indubitably imposes the certainty of a common source, called by convention “Common Indo-European.” These languages include the Celtic group, the Italic group, the Germanic group, the Balto-Slavic group, Greek, Albanian, Armenian, Indo-Iranian (Sanskrit, Old Persian epigraphic, Avestan), Hittite of Asia Minor, Tocharian of Central Asia—not to speak of vanished languages (Thracian, Phrygian, etc.). The morphological, syntactic, and phonetic similarities of these various families led linguists to conclude, with Jean Naudou, that there “must necessarily have existed an Indo-European people—perhaps a confederation of societies scattered over a vast domain and subject to diverse influences—among whom linguistic unity constituted a conscious bond (104).” The study of affinities among the different idioms, which made it possible to distribute them into two great groups (an eastern group with Indo-Iranian, Armenian, Balto-Slavic, and a western group with Italo-Celtic, Germanic, and Greek, to which Tocharian is curiously attached), led to another observation scarcely less important: namely, that “the dispersion of the Indo-European groups must be conceived as a radiation from the initial area of occupation (105).”

It should also be noted that none of the languages in question could be regarded as the root-language, or even as the direct and principal trunk of that language, of which the others would be mere branches. If Jean Naudou judges, with Antoine Meillet, that “the Indo-European languages

must be considered as the later development of dialects of one and the same language,” the conventional designation “Common Indo-European” that has had to be given it clearly shows that it could not be recognised in any of its derivatives. For Henri Hubert, Indo-European is moreover “not even the shadow of a spoken language,” but only “a system of linguistic facts,” vestiges of a lost language. From this confrontation of opinions one will retain that the notion of a single primitive language corresponds to an indubitable reality, and not to a mere working hypothesis; but that, on the other hand, this notion can only be grasped by synthesis, as an integral whose derivatives alone can be seized. It goes without saying that linguistic facts are only reflections of far deeper events; and the notion of a mother tongue, in particular, is not separable from that of a primitive tradition. One will recall, in fact, that these were sacred languages, as Sanskrit and Avestan still testify, and as indeed all archaic languages were. Now a sacred language is such not by its liturgical destination, but by its symbolic constitution, in the strict sense of the word, which makes it a hierophany, a true hypostasis—in Light and in Number—of the Ideas or Forms (*eidōs*) and the eternal Energies of the Logos. From this comes its transcendent efficacy, notably in ritual invocation, and its role as support of Revelation. The mystery of the origin of languages thus touches directly on that of the divine Source of language, symbol, and rite, and on that of the constitution of Man as *imago Dei*, which confers upon him, according to Mohyiddîn Ibn ‘Arabi’s words, the “aptitude to embrace all essential Truths,” and thus to express them in symbols, because “all that the ‘divine Form’ implies—that is, the whole ensemble of the divine Names (or universal Qualities)—is manifested in this human constitution, which, by that fact, is distinguished (from other creatures) by the integration of all existence (106).” The power of naming that follows from this, and which is the same as the power of blessing (*benedicere*), is therefore, par excellence, a specification of the Adamic form and function; it presupposes the integrity of that form and that function.

(98) Henri Martin, *Histoire de France*, op. cit., vol. III, p. 394.

(99) Cf. Auguste Le Prévost’s commentary on the passage in which Orderic Vitalis reports these prophecies, in Book XII of his *Ecclesiastical History*, under the year 1128: “Merlin’s predictions, accepted without discussion as soon as they appeared, were placed, like those of the Sibyls, more or less on the same level as the Holy Books, carefully commented upon from the twelfth century onward and ceaselessly cited with respect throughout the whole duration of the Middle Ages.” Cited by Hucher, op. cit., vol. I, p. 504.

(100) Henri Martin, op. cit., vol. III, p. 353.

(101) Cited by Hucher, op. cit., vol. I, p. 3.

(102) Henri Hubert, *Les Celtes*, Renaissance du Livre, Paris, 1932, vol. I, p. 40; following citations: vol. II, pp. 273 and 281.

(103) Ibid., vol. I, p. 217.

(104) Jean Naudou, “Protohistoire,” in *Histoire Universelle*, vol. I, *Encyclopédie de la Pléiade*, Paris, 1956, p. 68.

(105) Ibid., p. 69. (Emphasis in the original.)

(106) [Reference continues beyond the provided excerpt.]

One might object that what is said here could be valid only for the primordial or “Syriac” language (in Arabic *loghah sûryaniyah*), with which we by no means claim to identify the primitive Indo-European language. We reply that every sacred language is “primordial” in its essence, even if, historically, it descends from another sacred language. This very descent is hieratic in its means and in its paths, for it necessarily corresponds to a new form of Tradition adapting itself to the special cyclical conditions—mental and physical—of the portion of humanity for which it is intended. It therefore always presupposes the conscious exercise of the Adamic function.

This makes it possible to glimpse the meaning of facts that official scholarship has not been able to account for: first, the mysterious “loss” of the mother tongue, which translates the reabsorption of the tradition of which it was the support; next, the diffusion, from a single centre, of several languages that constituted its lineage, and not merely its dialectal degeneration; moreover, the coextensiveness between the different types of civilisation issuing from this centre and their respective idioms; finally, the development of these civilisations and these languages into distinct areas of expansion, under the guidance or inspiration of priests and prophets. However obscure these facts may be, they appear as the trace of immense events in the spiritual order and in the human order, escaping all dating, but whose influence has never ceased to make itself felt in the destiny of peoples. They presuppose a theocratic organisation of primordial societies, which archaeology is obliged to admit as well. “To the east of the area of expansion of the Indo-Europeans,” says Henri Hubert again, “we find societies of priests quite comparable, in their credit and their power, to the Druids: these are the Iranian Magi and the Brahmins of India. The Druids seem to differ from the latter only because they do not constitute a closed caste... It is not merely comparable priesthoods, but identical priesthoods... All these identities prove that the institutions to which even late texts allude are of very great antiquity,” and that the primitive Indo-European societies “were already societies of a high type: they had chiefs, priests, a formal law (107).” Jean Naudou, for his part, specifies: “Indo-European religion and society were hierarchical and comprised three levels: a sacerdotal and sovereign level, itself with two aspects—one violent and magical, the other benevolent and juridical; a warrior level; a popular and productive level (108).” As for the two aspects of the priesthood, we would rather say that they are one of rigour and the other of mercy, in the image of the Divinity; and one can understand from what precedes that it is a matter here of theurgy rather than “magic.” One will also note that sacerdotal authority was at the same time sovereign—in other words, that it was a matter of those Priest-Kings of whom the Vedas say that they were “beyond the castes” (*ativarnâshramî*): another index of primordality.

All these data allow one to see in the Indo-European “cradle” a very high spiritual Centre, and one of the principal stations of the primordial Tradition in its sacred march from the original polar indistinction to its eastern seat, at the dawn of History. The hyperborean origin of Tradition—at a time when climatic conditions were entirely different from those that have prevailed since historical times—is attested by the Vedas, the most ancient sacred texts, as the work of B. G. Tilak has shown, completing that of Warren and of Rhys (109). This indication is

corroborated by the Avesta, and is met, from another side, by the post-Atlantean traditions of ancient Mexico. Frequent allusions to this primitive northern habitat are supplied by Celtic, Germanic, Scandinavian, and Finnish mythologies; one also finds its trace in the Homeric texts (the “Syria beyond Ortygia,” where are the “revolutions of the Sun”), in various ancient authors (Herodotus, IV, 24; Diodorus Siculus, II, 47, following Hecataeus of Abdera; Plutarch, etc.), and in the Hebrew tradition, as we saw above.

The plane of prophetic reality on which this “descent” of Tradition was situated makes it possible to say nothing about it except that it was a “walking with God” in the sense of Genesis—that is, a walking with the Shekinah—and that through it the spiritual integration of the human cycle was to be maintained across the new conditions born of its ineluctable distancing from origins and from the Principle. Its stations in fact corresponded to cyclical periods covering an indeterminate number of centuries and millennia. The one to which the “Indo-European mystery” is attached is not the first of them, and it is certainly posterior to the detachment of the Atlantean branch. If, moreover, it is difficult to situate, with respect to it, the pre-Celtic, Iberian, and Ligurian civilisations, what Abbé Breuil quite rightly calls the “megalithic idea” links them to the same traditional current, for the continuity of this “idea” within Druidism implies a continuity of tradition and priesthood. Be that as it may, Celtism was, in the West, the major form of that universal remanifestation of the hyperborean Tradition which marks the Indo-European station; and its spiritual hegemony exercised itself directly or indirectly over all the peoples of Central, Western, and Northern Europe, while another Indo-European current, which seems distinct though closely related, came, through the Thracians (Getae and Dacians, close to the Cimmerians), to give birth to the Greco-Roman tradition (the Greeks attributed to the Thracians the “invention” of Music, Poetry, and the Mysteries); and it is known that, like the very cult of Delphic Apollo, Orphism and later Pythagoreanism claimed hyperborean origins. As for the junction between the Atlantean current and the properly hyperborean current, it poses—certain though it is—an enigma whose solution should, it seems, be sought at once in Celtide, in Chaldaea (a word of the same root as “Celt,” witness to one and the same traditional origin), and in Egypt.

Whatever may be the case with this last problem, which we can evoke here only by way of reminder, the glance we have just cast upon the great traditional past allows a first answer to the question we had posed to ourselves: what the Druids, the Brahmins, the Magi, the Chaldeans held and transmitted is—beyond time, space, and its different sacred expressions—the Tradition itself. And this Tradition, however misrecognised it may be today, was not foreign to so-called classical Greek thought, for it asserted nothing other than this when, with Plato and Aristotle, it saw in the “barbarian” peoples the venerable initiators of Philosophy—that is, of divine *Sophia*, transcendent Wisdom and the Mysteries. Where moderns want to see a “fable,” while recognising somewhat contradictorily the esoteric foundations of this Philosophy, there was in reality a constant tradition still affirmed in the first centuries of our era. Thus the Pythagorean Numenius of Apamea, in his treatise *On the Good*: “To treat the problem of God, one must not rely only on Plato’s testimonies, but go further back and connect his affirmations with Pythagoras’s teachings; what am I saying—appeal to peoples of good repute, comparing their initiations, their dogmas, their cultic ceremonies which they perform in full accord with Plato’s

principles: all that the Brahmins, the Jews, the Magi, and the Egyptians have established.” And Diogenes Laërtius, as a preamble to his *Lives of the Philosophers*: “Some would have it that Philosophy began among the Barbarians: for there were the Magi among the Persians, the Chaldeans among the Babylonians or Assyrians, the Gymnosophists (Brahmins) in India, the Druids among the Celts and Galatians.” Nor did the Christian apologists of the first centuries—Tertullian, Arnobius, Saint Jerome, Saint Augustine—fail to admit it still as a notorious truth not open to discussion (110). One will also observe that, despite the multiplicity of sources and forms of expression, all these authors speak of “Philosophy” as of a consistent and single reality. This fact alone, if one wished to meditate on it, would suffice by itself to ruin the “fable” thesis.

In the perspective thus opened, what Abraham carried with him as he left Chaldea was not essentially different from what the Druids were later to entrust to Celtic Christianity before disappearing—and which in fact identified itself with the heart of the Christian message: the secret of the pure Tradition (*ed-dîn el-hanîfî*, or *hanîfiyyah*), which Melchizedek was to confirm to him in the name of God Most High. And the persistence, among the two direct legatees of the Abrahamic testament—Judaism and Islam—of symbolic or doctrinal elements such as the drink of immortality, the ritual use of rough stones or betyls, the notion of the sacred Mountain and of the supreme Land, that of cosmic cycles, etc., are so many indices of this immemorial traditional inheritance.

But Islam, open by supernatural vocation to all forms of authentic revelation—prophetic or sapiential—has moreover played a role of integration with respect not only to Mazdaism and Chaldeo-Egyptian Hermetism, but also to the Pythagorean and Platonic current which, contrary to what happened in Europe, had been maintained in the Arabo-Persian milieu with a continuity that enabled it to keep its esoteric foundations alive (111). Thus one may say that, by its providential capacity for welcoming and synthesising all the modes of universal Prophecy, Islam was, among all, the one able to discern the name of the Grail written in the stars.

For the Grail, in its most general macrocosmic significance, represents the spiritual and doctrinal deposit of the primordial Tradition. Such is the sense of the legend that has it recovered by Seth in the earthly Paradise. If, therefore, it is not inaccurate to attribute to the Celts its preservation up to the time of Christ, as some do, that means that the Celts count among the regular holders of the primordial Tradition, but not that they were the only ones—which would, moreover, be too obviously inaccurate. It is therefore perfectly legitimate, from the traditional point of view, to admit conjointly the validity of the three distinct genealogies that can be discerned in its legend: Celtic, Christian, and Eastern of Islamic lineage. From this point of view—which, in such matters, can only reject all others—alone can one account for the apparent opposition among equally valid data that assign to it in turn one or another of these origins. It is true that, in coming into Celtic land by divine command, the Grail in a sense rejoined itself. But it is also true, as its final withdrawal shows, that its true homeland is in that East at once physical and spiritual where all traditions, since historical times, agree in situating the Centre of the World. It is perhaps not irrelevant to note in this regard that, in the visions of Anne-Catherine Emmerich, the Vessel that received the divine Body and Blood is the very one that served Melchizedek to institute the sacrifice of Bread and Wine in the presence of the father of the three monotheistic traditions.

One will note, finally, that, according to Robert de Boron, the motive given from on High for the Grail's migration to the far West is that "the world goes on and will go on by swallowing," or, according to the verse version, that "...the world goes on ahead / and every day grows smaller." This linking of the West, the place where the sun sets, with the fatal acceleration and decline of the age, implicitly posits the East as the place of primordality and of return to origins. To grasp its full significance, one must know that the sacred "orientation" of Christendom had not only the value of a paradisaic reminiscence, but also—and above all—that of a spiritual and eschatological intention connected with the notion of a sacral structure of the world, ordered to "Paradise" as to its own Centre and the principle of its apocalyptic renewal. This providential migration therefore appears, in the end, as aiming—in the full sense of the word—at a "re-orientation" of the West.

That the revelation of the Grail was for the Christian world a new and striking event can be seen in its suddenness, in its extraordinary fertility, in the change of speculative level compared with earlier legendary teachings, including that of the Round Table, and above all in the direct character of its theophanic affirmation. If the lineage with the Celtic basin or "cauldron" is beyond doubt (Taliesin speaks of an Arthurian descent into the underworld in search of it), it is at the price of a transfiguration, for by then it appeared only in Welsh folk tales and in a state of magical degradation. The Arthurian cycle properly so called, of Breton origin, makes no mention of it. Thus it has been possible to say that "there exists in none of the Celtic literatures, however rich they may be, any narrative that could have served as a model for the compositions, so varied, that our medieval literature drew from this subject (the Grail) (112)." As for Christian legend, if one finds there the first part of the story of Joseph of Arimathea, it keeps complete silence on the subject of the Grail, and the passage often cited in this connection from Honorius of Augsburg's *Gemma animae* would only confirm that silence rather than break it. It is moreover remarkable to observe that the legend of Joseph's apostolate in Great Britain remains unknown there until the middle of the twelfth century. No doubt the anonymous author of one of the prose versions assures us that the Book of the Grail was supernaturally "handed" to him seven hundred and seventeen years after the Passion; and Helinand, in 1205, after saying *Hanc historiam latine scriptam invenire non potui*, adds: *sed tantum gallice scripta habetur a quibusdam proceribus*. But these are after-the-fact indications that change nothing about the event itself. That event, as we have seen, presents itself as linked to the deepest sources not only of Christian spirituality but of the universal traditional community. One cannot be mistaken about its nature, which is one of the rare points on which all versions show an invariable unanimity: what was at stake was the revivification of the Christian spiritual Centre and of its sacred deposit. Now there are only two possible hypotheses here: either this revivification is solely the work of Western initiatic organisations, Christian or Celto-Christian; or else it was inspired and aided by an external intervention—that is, from the East—whatever its modes may have been. If the first hypothesis were the right one—and to confine ourselves to this single argument—would one find for the Grail any other form and any other "history" than that of the Christic Vessel? It seems to us enough to pose the question in order to answer it, and at the same time to discover the true explanation and scope of Islam's influence on one of the major branches of the "sovereign Adventure."

One might object that, precisely, this influence is observable only on a single branch. We reply that one ought rather to be astonished to find it so patent, given that it has been discovered only in our own day in Dante's work, where it is no longer disputed. Nor should one attach decisive importance either to the hostility of certain versions towards the "Saracens" or to their silences. Islam's action was situated on an entirely different plane, and certainly did not operate upon the redactors—whose anti-Islamism is probably sincere—nor even, perhaps (except in Wolfram's case), upon their direct inspirers. It nevertheless remains that the coexistence, and perhaps the rivalry, of two doctrinal currents separated by such differences of expression and symbolic intention must certainly have been of extreme importance for the destiny of the Grail, and by repercussion for that of the West. For, as we shall now see, the Grail, by its presence, was not only a principle of spiritual renewal, but also a solution of history—and this implied, on the part of the Christian world, choices which, the event proved, were already no longer within its measure.

IX

From Arthur's Empire to the Empire of the Grail

Arthur, the illustrious king of the Britons of the sixth century, passed very quickly from history into legend—if indeed, in his case, they were ever distinguished. Soon after his disappearance, says Henri Martin, he "is no longer merely a national hero; he is the 'son of the cloud,' of Uther with the Dragon head, 'king of darkness,' a mysterious and veiled being, ordainer of battles, superior to Hu himself—of Uther who has the rainbow for his shield, and who took the form of the cloud to beget his son. Arthur received from his father the great sword: he traverses the universe as a conqueror; he is proclaimed emperor of the world. Carried off to heaven after being mortally wounded at the battle of Camlan, he dwells in the constellation that bears his name (Arthur's Chariot, the Great Bear): one day he will descend from it again to the earth. He has become the very type of the heroic genius of the Celts, the type raised to the point of substituting Arthur for the ancient Bel as Bull of Tumult, genius of the Sun and of war." Later, this type evolves. Arthur is still "the chief of the heroic world, but he is no longer the son of a god: he is only the fruit of the illicit loves of a hero. He is no longer carried up among the constellations. Nonetheless his disappearance remains veiled in the supernatural: he is not dead, he will not die; nine fairies keep him in the holy Isle of Avalon, whence he will come to avenge his people, his two Britains (113)." Disappeared, he is not truly absent; his horns are heard in the Breton forest. The Britons have wanted no other king after him, because of this invisible presence and the expectation of his blessed return (114).

A polar hero (his name comes from *Art*, the Bear, which bears a close relation to the Celtic symbolism of the Pole) (115), his traits as an imperial prototype become more precise: if he is no longer the son of a god, it is God Himself who gives him the Empire of the World, symbolised by the sword Excalibur, and whose limits—then forbidden to be crossed—bear his name (the Arthurian boundaries, which are, on the one hand, at the eastern extremity of India, according to the *Roman d'Alexandre*, that is, at the confines of Paradise, and, on the other hand, at the far West, identified with the Pillars of Hercules, with whom Arthur was moreover often

assimilated). He too is “ordainer of battles” (*ipse dux erat bellorum*, says Nennius), for it is by the sword’s point that he must conquer his empire against the enemies of the Britons and of God. This empire is not only the earthly world, but also the intermediate or subtle world—that is, the entire sublunary world, domain of the Lesser Mysteries. In that capacity, he is sovereign by right over all “enchanted” places: “And all these faëry places are Arthur of Britain’s,” says the Brun de la Montagne. In all this, he is the faithful agent of Myrrdhin or Merlin, from whom he is not essentially distinct: the elusive, omnipresent, multiform prophet, son of a virgin and an airy spirit, master of the elements, holder of the “divine secrets,” spiritual chief and unifier of the Celtic peoples, who comes out of his “house of glass,” deep in the forest par excellence (Calydon, or Brocéliande), to assist him at critical moments. It is on Merlin’s directives that he institutes the Round Table, which turns like the world; this makes it the “hub of the World” and completes the characterisation of Arthur as universal Monarch, akin to the Hindu *Chakravarti*. A sign of the regularity of this initiatic Centre—referred to throughout the Middle Ages as the highest chivalric authority—is provided by the duodenary constitution of its principal college, an image of the twelve zodiacal suns or the twelve cyclical manifestations of the single and eternal Essence. Arthur himself represents this Essence in its constancy and its non-acting fixity. It is precisely by this non-action that he orders and “authorises” action. He thus realises temporal power in its normal status of spiritual reabsorption, which allows the divine Principle to act through him without obstacle or alteration. His union with Merlin is another sign of this, for it expresses the normal integration of the two powers in their common Source.

Through these rapid indications, one sees that the Arthurian theme offers, in itself and independently of that of the Grail, a veritable doctrinal of Empire. To grasp its full scope, one must remember that the imperial idea was one of the major dominants of medieval thought and faith, participating immediately in the finality of the Kingdom of God. The Empire was, with the Priesthood, one of the two normal and necessary aspects of the Lieutenancy conferred naturally and supernaturally upon Man by the “King of Heaven.” This is therefore not a political formula, even one tinged with mysticism, but the communication to the Christian world of the authority and reality of Christ under His royal aspect. One may therefore speak of an imperial Mystery, which is nothing other than the Christic Mystery in its temporal extension—and also in its eschatological perspective, for the royal aspect relates rather to the Second Coming, as the Empire, in its ultimate manifestation, relates to the heavenly Jerusalem. In the expectation of that Hour when the sacerdotal and royal authorities will be reunited on a single august head, the Empire remains, like the Church, a transcendental, archetypal reality toward which history must tend, since it must consummate it.

However foreign such a conception may be to the modern mentality, it was authentically that of the Middle Ages, for which the spiritual and the temporal were only “categories” of the sacred. This is what allows the historian to make observations such as Joseph Calmette’s, concerning the Carolingian imperial renewal: “The notion of the Empire, collapsed in the facts (after 476), remains intact on the plane of pure idea... Its traces are innumerable in literature, especially ecclesiastical. The Empire has not ceased to be. It must, from virtual, become real again. Every enlightened soul longs to see it again and has, as it were, nostalgia for that chosen homeland. Now the dream of the lettered and the thinkers is going to take shape; what Justinian could not

do, a Frankish dynasty will realise. History, under its impulse, will seem to flow back towards its source. Henceforth, in the West, the imperial idea—whether interpreted or realised in diverse ways—will always occupy a foremost place in the preoccupations of sovereigns and peoples (116).”

Among other witnesses to the sacred character of the Arthurian symbol and of the imperial function, let us cite the portal of Modena Cathedral, dedicated to Arthur (c. 1160), and the famous Lateran mosaic, on which we shall pause for a moment. One sees there Pope Leo and the Emperor Charles, kneeling at the feet of Saint Peter, facing one another on the same horizontal plane. The three figures form a ternary in which Saint Peter appears in majesty—that is, as the personification of a principle. He bestows simultaneously upon Leo and Charles two distinct investitures: one, by the *pallium*, purely sacerdotal; and the other, by the *vexillum*, imperial, which Charles thus receives directly. One further notes that he keeps in his bosom the golden key of spiritual authority and the silver key of temporal power. The Prince of the Apostles therefore does not act here as Head of the Church, but in the supreme spiritual Function—permanent because universal—of *Vicarius Christi*, Source of the two powers. We shall see better further on what such a representation could be answering to. Let us recall here that, in the *vexillum*, three symbols converge: that of the Cross, that of the Lance, and that of the Standard. This is why it figures in medieval iconography as an attribute of the warrior Christ. The very Cross of the Resurrection, with its banderole, is nothing other than a *vexillum*, as Émile Mâle rightly remarked (117), which completes the demonstration of the close association, in medieval thought, between the imperial “idea” and the spiritual and parousiac reality expressed in the traditional notion of Christ the King.

It is to this immanence—and we would willingly say to this imminence—of the imperial Mystery that are due the almost immediate legendary transposition of its principal historical manifestations, and the messianic and eschatological character that marked them so strongly. In his *Notes on Latin Medieval Messianism*, P. Alphanéry clearly brought out the messianic traits of the archetypal Emperor, as they emerge from the legends of Charlemagne, Frederick Barbarossa, Frederick II, or figures of lesser stature but analogous function. The theme of their career is always the same: divine election, trial, retreat, glorious return. A eucharistic or baptismal theme is often added (passing through waters, change of name); more generally still, the chosen Emperor is surrounded by a college of twelve members. The time of his *absconditio* is spent in a Mountain (Wunderberg, Kyffhäuser) or in an Unknown Land beyond the sea—an obvious symbol of the Centre of the World. From there he will one day come forth to fight the Antichrist: the *renovatio imperii* thus announces the *reparatio temporum*. P. Alphanéry rightly remarks that each of the legendary heroes assuming the traits of the Emperor, initially the head of a people, will return at the head of all peoples—or rather at the head of the universal people of the saints (118). In all cases, therefore, it is one single function; so that the imperial apocalypse joins that of John, those of Baruch and Ezra and the rabbinic traditions, and those received in Islam concerning the Mahdī and the return of *Seyidnâ Aïssa*. This conjunction should not surprise us, for if the imperial tradition referred historically to the Roman inheritance and theologically to the person of Christ the King, it sank deep roots into a universal traditional

fund—particularly invariable on this point—and more especially into the fund of Abrahamic origin, at the source of which we find again the Priest-King *par excellence*, Melki-Tsedeq.

One sees against what background, at once historical and “trans-historical,” Arthur—perpetual chief of all earthly Chivalry—came to project the exemplar of a royal Art conscious of its means and its goal. But, if he indicated the end of Chivalry, which is to become heavenly, he also defined the bounds of his own domain—marked, in particular, by the discontinuity between his kingdom and Montsalvage—and, between the earthly and the heavenly, that boundary-passage which is a transfiguration. The theophany of the Grail completes the Earth. That is why, if Arthur’s sphere is the normal access-route to that of the Grail, it is, one might say, only tangent to it; and, if the two chivalries can coexist, they do not interpenetrate, the second adding to the royal quality of the first—which it possesses eminently—the sacerdotal quality that it holds by election, realising the double aspect of that Lieutenancy, hypostasis of the eternal Priesthood. One then discerns how Arthur’s Empire could, on a certain plane, validly be held as an end in itself, only to become—once the Grail is announced—merely its stage and its virtuality. The Empire of the Grail, to which Arthur’s naturally orders itself, is in act that *sacrum imperium* awaited at the end of the cycle of history, of which the historical Holy Empire was only a distant figure and a hope ultimately disappointed. If it is future for the world, it is because it is not of this world, though it is near it; and even while being its end, there is between them too that boundary-passage, that relation of mystery of which we have spoken and which, in the *Parzival*, the episode of Lohengrin and the Forbidden Question evokes. But it endures, for the end of a thing cannot fail to be the permanent actuality of its Principle, and its Chivalry itself is not chained tightly enough to history to die with its “seasons.”

X

The Equally Valid Word

The teaching of the Grail did not openly pose the problem of the relations between Papacy and Empire, and had no need to do so on the plane that was its own. As such, that problem existed only by the fatality of the age. As for the very duality of the two great exoteric functions, it has complex reasons the study of which would exceed the framework of this work, and which bear above all on the particular modalities of the Christic manifestation and of Christianity’s extension to the Gentile world. Be that as it may, this duality implied by itself a common principle, imposed metaphysically by their essential unity, and traditionally by Christianity’s belonging to the Order of Melki-Tsedeq. Yet a moment was bound to come when fatality would impose on the heirs of the Temple the need to take a position in this perspective, as openly as the deep nature of the doctrine and initiatic secrecy allowed. That moment was marked, at the threshold of the fourteenth century, by two major symptoms of the malady from which Christendom was to die—not, of course, as Church, but as human and divine “City”: the disappearance of the Order of the Temple, and the conflict—more serious than ever—between Papacy and Empire, appearing all the more irreparable because it had long ceased to be merely about competencies and attributions, and had become a matter of principle. Of this taking of position, Dante’s work is the boldest, the most complete, and, for us, the most precious witness.

The *De Monarchia*, in particular—published on the occasion of Henry VII's descent into Italy—sets out, scarcely veiled beneath its scholastic form, a doctrine very far from being purely abstract and theoretical, as one might believe on a somewhat artificial reading. Among the passages in which the author most clearly reveals his deeper thought, we shall cite the one where he refutes the argument that, since Pope and Emperor are men, and all men are ordered to one man who is their measure and type, the Emperor is necessarily ordered to the Pope, since the Pope cannot be ordered to another man. Here is what Dante says:

“Insofar as they are relational beings (pontificate and imperial power being relations and not substantial forms like humanity), either they must be ordered one to another if one is subordinated to the other; or they belong to one and the same species of relation; or they are ordered to a third being, as to their archetype. Now one cannot maintain that one is subordinated to the other, for in that case one would be predicated of the other, which is false. We do not say, indeed, that the Emperor is Pope, nor conversely. One cannot maintain either that they belong to the same species, for the essence of the Papacy is not that of the Empire. Therefore they are ordered to a being in whom they find their unity.

“To understand this third assertion, let us recall that relation behaves with respect to relation as the relative with respect to the relative. The Papacy and the Empire, since they are relations of pre-eminence, must be ordered to a relation of pre-eminence from which they derive; therefore the Pope and the Emperor, since they are relatives, must be ordered to a being in whom the very relation of pre-eminence is found, without particular characteristics. Thus it is evident that the Pope and the Emperor, insofar as they are men, are ordered to one single being; insofar as Pope and insofar as Emperor, they are ordered to another being (119).”

The apparent conclusion is that the Emperor cannot be ordered to the Pope. But there is another conclusion which, though not developed, is no less explicit: if the Emperor and the Pope are ordered, on the one hand as men, and on the other hand as Pope and Emperor, to two distinct beings, then they are not immediately ordered to God; in other words, there does indeed exist, at the source of their functions, that “substance inferior to God” in which “the relation of pre-eminence itself is found, without particular characteristics.” Dante was not a man to play with words or chase chimeras, and one may rather think that in that year 1311, when destiny still seemed in suspense, it was difficult and no doubt useless to say more. However, we would not have cited this curious passage if, whatever the intellectual greatness of its author, it expressed only a personal thesis. But it is known today that this is not so. Like Wolfram at another time, but with an authority of his own to which that of the good knight cannot be compared, Dante spoke in the name of the initiatic organisations heir to the Order of the Temple, and in particular of the *Fede Santa*, of which he was doubtless one of the leaders. Between the serene reserve of the first and the ardent apology of the second, the events that had occurred since 1307 make all the difference.

From Wolfram to Dante, the doctrinal filiation does not need to be demonstrated. The observation of traces of Islamic influence in the great Ghibelline, analogous to those we have revealed in his predecessor, thus takes on a significance that need not be underlined. This influence is no longer in question today, and, if it is discussed, it is only as to its nature. Here is

what B. Landry says in the Introduction to his French edition of the *De Monarchia*: “A philosopher steeped in Averroism as much as a Christian can be: such is Dante as he appears in his *De Monarchia*. Besides, did he not always and everywhere love the Arabs? Let us recall that Dante did not wish to place in hell the one whom the Augustinians call the Accursed, and whom he calls the Author of the Great Commentary; let us recall again that Siger of Brabant, the Parisian Averroist whom Saint Thomas opposed with such great force, sits in Paradise with his illustrious adversary. Finally, let us not forget that Dante had read and meditated on Arabic literature; he knew the voyages that Muhammad had made into the other world, and it has been shown that the circles of Dante’s Hell are very similar to those of the Muslim Hell.

“Dante is strongly imbued with Arabic thought; he lives in a country that Frederick II moulded, and he was dazzled, like many of his contemporaries, by the doctrine that, through Avicenna and especially Averroes, the Philosopher revealed to the Western world (120).”

In truth, if Dante is imbued with Arabic thought (it would be more exact to say Islamic), it is not only through Averroism but also, and above all, through Sufi esotericism, and in particular through the teaching of Ibn Masârra and of Mohyiddîn Ibn Arabî. The work of Miguel Asín Palacios has shown the indisputable influence of works such as the *Futûhât al-Makkiyyah* and the *Kitâb al-Isrâ* on the *Divine Comedy*, the *Vita Nuova*, and the *Convito* (121). The word “imbued” is apt in that it implies an intellectual sharing situated at the very sources of thought, and whose uncontested esotericism in the respective works suffices to exclude any external or “profane” character. René Guénon observed how significant, in this respect, is the silence maintained by Dante regarding the one from whom he borrowed most of the symbolism of the *Divine Comedy*, whereas he does not hesitate to name in his works numerous exoteric authors such as Avicenna, Averroes, Alfarabi, Albumasar, Al-Farghânî, Al-Ghazzâlî (the last, though a Sufi Master, was chiefly known in the West as a doctor), and so on.

The doctrine of the universal Empire in Dante, for its part, does indeed find in Aristotle—through the Muslim doctors—a counterpart and a warrant. But when he says, of the Emperor, that “God alone chooses, God alone invests, for God alone has no superior,” or again that “the temporal authority of the Monarch descends upon him from the universal Source of authority, without any intermediary” (122), this is not merely the transposition, into a social “ideal” order, of a philosophy of cosmic order: it is a venerable reality, actually living and threatened, which it was important to defend at once against those who claimed to deny it and against those who diverted it to partisan advantage, and to promote, in union and balance with spiritual authority, on the bases of authenticity and regularity that only universal traditional Wisdom could provide.

It would be to see things in a very superficial light to believe that the doctrinal help Dante found among the Arabs was limited to Peripateticism, when one knows that he knew and used the teaching of Mohyiddîn Ibn Arabî—and when the Master had formulated, on the very object to which Dante had devoted his life, the deepest and most complete doctrine ever, no doubt, offered to the West.

In works of direct exposition such as the *De Monarchia* or the *Convito*, intended for wide circulation and obliged to reckon with the vigilance of the Holy Office (it is known that the *De*

Monarchia was to be burned in 1327 by order of Cardinal Du Puget, the Pope's legate), one cannot expect to find anything but relations of substance with the doctrine of the Caliphate as Mohyiddin presents it, notably in Chapter 73 of his *Futûhât* (123). But the essential notions are there: that of the universality of the Empire, and that of direct divine investiture. The latter, at least, owes nothing to Aristotle; and one would vainly seek, moreover, patristic sources for it, not to mention the Church's official doctrine, which, with the Augustinians, aimed to establish the absolute primacy of the pontifical See.

It will be noted that Dante, doubtless for the reasons indicated above, allows the ambiguity between the exoteric and esoteric aspects of the Empire—as of the Papacy—to remain intact. This ambiguity is found again in the notion and the word *Khalîfah*, by which the Shaykh al-Akbar means both the supreme Pole and the outward Islamic authority. But he, who had no comparable motives for silence, clearly distinguishes an inner Caliphate and an outer Caliphate, the first alone being truly universal, while indicating moreover that the two functions may exceptionally coincide, as was the case for the first four Caliphs (Abu Bakr, Omar, Othman, and Alî), as well as for a few others later on. One may perhaps see an analogous coincidence, as regards the Empire, in the person of the “great Henry” whom Dante places at the highest degree of Paradise, that is, of initiatic “Science” (124). But it is difficult to say whether this coincidence was effective or merely symbolic, Henry VII perhaps having been, as Emperor and as initiate, only the representative of the invisible authority that Rosicrucianism was later to designate by the name of *Imperator*. If Dante maintains on this point an understandable reserve, he nevertheless does not hesitate to deliver, in a form admittedly enigmatic, significant indications regarding the deeper aspect of the imperial tradition and its spiritual and eschatological finality. We mean the mysterious Veltro (*Inferno*, I, 100–111) and the “*cinquecento diece e cinque, messo di Dio*” (*Purgatorio*, XXXIII, 43–44), heir of the imperial Eagle, in whom is announced a restorative mission at once temporal and spiritual, of a distinctly apocalyptic character. Without prejudice to more restricted applications that Dante may incidentally have had in view, there is here, without any doubt, the transfiguration of the Empire into the true and universal *sacrum Imperium* awaited at the end of time. Now this “messenger of God” has a precise counterpart in Islamic eschatology, in the person of the Mahdî (the one “guided” by God), precursor of the Second Coming. Another fundamental notion in Mohyiddin's teaching is that of the transcendent unity of Prophecy, or of universal Tradition. Now, immediately after affirming the universality of the imperial function, in the last of our citations, Dante adds: “The overflowing goodness of this Source, one and simple in itself, spreads out into a multitude of rivulets.” If it were only a matter of affirming the distinct origin of the imperial “rivulet” in relation to the apostolic “rivulet,” would he speak of a “multitude”? Even then the doctrine would be clear, for to affirm it for two suffices to posit the principle. And could he, moreover, proclaim the universality of the Empire without recognizing that essential traditional unity of which it is only a corollary? Wolfram's teaching and Dante's may, in this respect, illuminate one another. But if one wished to seek for both explicit scriptural references, it is not in the Bible that one would find them: it is in the Qur'an, with texts such as this one, which sums up in a few words the whole of that doctrinal sequence, and which is like the supreme message of Islam to the People of the Book—that is, to Christians and Jews: “Say: O People of the Book! Come to a Word equally valid for us

and for you: that we worship none but God; that we associate nothing with Him; that we do not take some among ourselves as ‘lords’ apart from God.” (Qur’an, III, 57.)

Through this Word, given as the meeting point of the Torah, the Gospel, and the Qur’an, the sacred text defines the Way of pure Monotheism (*Hanīfiyyah*), or of absolute Unity (*Tawhīd*), which was that of Abraham (Qur’an, XIII, 29), and which, in the metaphysical and initiatic sense, is that of Supreme Identity, affirmed openly or esoterically by all traditional doctrines. It is situated at the synthetic level of the “Mother of the Book” (*Umm al-Kitāb*), the eternal prototype of all revealed Books, which is “with Allah” (Qur’an, XIII, 39) (125). In Jewish and Christian perspectives it is received respectively under the principal aspect of the Torah and of the Word; now, for Islam, “the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, is the Messenger of God and His Word which He cast into Mary” (Qur’an, IV, 169), as also the confirmation of the Torah (Qur’an, V, 50). But in the Islamic vision it is further made explicit as the final and totalizing synthesis of the earlier prophetic Words: he into whom Allah “cast” it as such, *Sayidnā Mohammed*, is the “Seal of universal Prophecy,” and this is why, according to the Hadith, he could say: “I have been given the comprehensive sums of words (*Jawāmi ‘u-l-Kalim*), and I have been sent to perfect the noblest virtues.” It is to this specific characteristic of prophetic totalization that Islam owed and owes its supernatural qualification to bear such a message to the People of the Book, and to work with them for its realization. If one takes up, in this regard, the terminology of Mohyiddīn Ibn Arabī in his *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, one will observe that the Word equally valid corresponds exactly to the Christic precious Stone descended from Heaven with the Imprints of divine Kingship, but under the special aspect of universal synthesis proper to the Second Coming, which will mark the closure of the present human cycle, whereas the Mohammedan synthesis marked the closure of law-giving prophecy. It is indeed this Stone whose name Flégétanis had read in the stars, and which Kyot, by hearsay, at once recognized. As Trevrizent said to Parzival, “it has not ceased to be pure.”

(125) To the “Mother of the Book,” or “eternal Qur’an,” correspond notably the “primordial Veda,” the “eternal *Sefer*,” the “eternal Gospel.”

Some Conclusions

“So holy a thing is the Grail” that one cannot claim to exhaust its problems, still less its meanings. That is why, at the end of this study, we would readily leave it to the reader to decide for himself which points seem to him established, hoping that the others may offer him useful directions for research and meditation. Yet the honour due to the subject itself nonetheless requires that we propose a few conclusions. If they are not exclusive, nor, on certain points, overly categorical, they seem to us, in any case, consonant with the “truth” of the Grail. The “sovereign legend” is not a poet’s invention. Nor is it the romanced expression of a certain theory of Grace. It is the resurgence, on Western Christian soil, of an immemorial traditional current touching the essential Mystery of all Revelation: the Mystery of the Knowledge of God according to God, “participation in the divine Nature” (II Peter 1:4), which is in itself Eternal Life (John 17:3), the consummation of Unity (John 17:23): the Mystery of *theōsis* or of

metaphysical *Tawhīd*. If, in this “fountain of teaching” momentarily uncovered, the apparently diverse waters of Celtism, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam were able to unite without corruption, it is because they were intellectually and spiritually pure, and came from the same single Source.

The modes and circumstances of this confluence are not of the sort that history can keep trace of. But it may not have been as complex as it can appear, if one recalls that it was preceded by the Christian integration of the Celtic legacy, and that, when it occurred, the conjunction of Judaic and Islamic esoterisms already existed for a long time. But what emerges from Wolfram’s text, as from multiple converging data, is that Islamic esoterism was mandated at a determinate moment by qualified representatives of universal traditional Wisdom to undertake, in agreement with its Christian and Jewish brothers, a work of initiatic restoration, one of whose principal aspects seems to have been the re-establishment of a conscious link between Western initiatic organizations and the supreme spiritual Centre, with a view to that “re-orientation” of the West of which we spoke above. On the basis of certain indications, one may ask whether this action of Islam was understood by all those who, normally, ought to have lent it their support. In any case, if the magisterium of the Grail was unique at the origin, as Wolfram suggests and as its very nature ought to make one think, its teaching seems nevertheless to have comprised fairly early two distinct currents: a current of apparently specifically Christian character, an expression in chivalric mode of Christianity’s own esoteric tradition enriched by the Celtic contribution, which developed according to the doctrinal and intellectual structures of the Western Church, within its dogmatic frames, and, if one believes Robert de Boron, with its “leave”—and a current retaining the mark of its Oriental inspiration and of its Islamic and Templar filiation, identical as to the doctrinal substance, but openly including, moreover, certain of its immediate consequences, such as the notion of the universality of the Grail and of the essential unity of traditions, which implied not only the esoteric deepening of the content of dogmas, but their metaphysical transposition, and thus tended, by transcendence, to the breaking of intellectual limits bound up with the very fact of their definition; and thereby also to the overturning, for the élites, of religious barriers, and to the opening—or rather the re-opening—of Christian spiritual “space” to the providential influences and assistance of the supreme Centre: the condition for the reintegration of Christendom, for its own fulfilment, into the universal traditional Order that its own Scriptures designated to it as a perpetual reality and Norm in the person and function of Melki-Tsedeq. The necessary and possible means of this work were, on the one hand, a true union, institutionally guaranteed, between the spiritual authorities of the respective traditions; on the other hand, the solution of the problem of the two powers, temporal and spiritual, whose existence increasingly threatened that of Christendom and was to contribute so largely to its ruin—a solution resting solely on the possibility of integrating them in a real and effective way into their common principle, Christ, *clavis David sceptrumque domus Israël*. This double possibility then presented itself to the consciousness of the responsible élites of the Christian world in that mysterious hypostasis named Grail: the hypostasis of Christic Reality under its two aspects, sacerdotal and royal, and in its Order.

The first of these currents seems to have been maintained, after the thirteenth century, only within organisations increasingly restricted and closed. The second, in which are recognized the intention and the interrupted work of the Templars, survived them through High Ghibellinism

and Rosicrucianism, but was to subsist, after the departure of the last Rose-Cross, only in the vestiges gathered up by Freemasonry. This duality, whatever may have been its circumstances and deeper motives, resulted in the intellectual isolation of Templarism, and thereby in the final failure—at least on the historical plane—of the last and supreme effort to win for the world the City of God. No doubt, before the City could descend from heaven to earth, the world still had to go on “going downhill,” and the darkest pages of history still remained to be written: those in which one would find not only the memory of the Grail, but even the memory of God. But if the Grail was again lost, after the best had believed, for an instant, that they could hope in its Empire, it is not so much, or not first of all, because of “sin,” which could not touch it, as because the West, by finally rejecting an almost concluded pact, had cut itself off from the Mystery of Grace and Justice that was both its chance and its sanction. This mystery is that of Melki-Tsedeq, eternal prototype of the Priesthood and foundation of the universal and imperishable traditional Order. The Grail is hidden in him together with the Word equally valid. It will never cease to be sought among the People of the Book and among the People of Unity. It is with this Word that they will find it again, for the One whom all the “children of Abraham” await—the *Sacerdos in aeternum* promised by oath to Israel, the Messiah of the Second Coming, *Seyidnâ ‘Îsâ*, “Seal of universal Sanctity”—has sent them in advance the same summons.